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CORRESPONDENCE

Blood sport

To the editors:

If Jeffrey Rosen ("The Bloods and the Crits," December 9, 1996) is as color-blind as he says, where was he in the trial that acquitted the L.A. police officers whose five-minute beating of motorist Rodney King was captured on videotape? Where was the 10,000-word essay laying the blame for the outrage on law-and-order academics, like James Q. Wilson perhaps, for whipping up a climate in which such things could happen?

The lawyers for the police officers told stories, too—it was just a light tap; our clients were afraid he was going to get up; his blackness played no part in their decision to treat him as they did—selecting and deselecting elements that they thought would resonate with the white suburban jury. Where was Rosen's condemnation of the race card then?

The fact is that white people tell stories, too—of white innocence, black animality (see Maureen Dowd, "THE SOUND AND THE JURY," *The New York Times*, November 21, 1996, citing Rosen with approval), defining discrimination narrowly so that it doesn't count unless provably intentional, and many others—except that they don't call them stories, but the truth.

In the last century, O.J. would have been lynched. Rosen cannot advocate that, but he can damn and disparage civil rights scholars (the Crits) and lawyers who were merely doing what our system provides in advocating for justice and providing representation for persons accused of crime.

In his view, no reasonable doubt exists about O.J.'s guilt, except that fabricated by tricky lawyers whipped up by academics like myself. But the fact is that the white story had holes in it. It didn't persuade, and for good reason. Instead of focusing on genuine outrages, like the Rodney King acquittal, or taking Marcia Clark's team to task for mishandling the prosecution's case, or blaming the Los Angeles police for allowing racists like Mark Fuhrman to work for them, Rosen finds fault with us.

Talk about displaced rage. Talk about a mass media lynching!

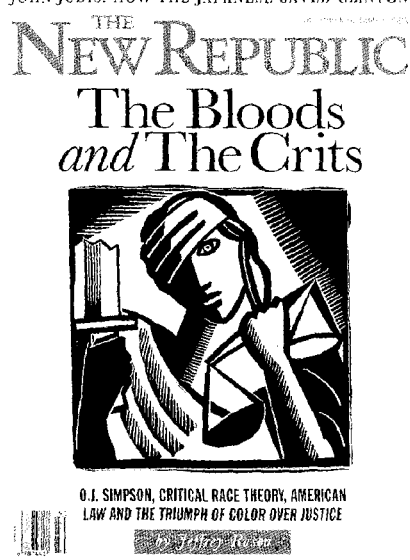
RICHARD DELGADO
Boulder, Colorado

To the editors:

Jeffrey Rosen's fascinating exegesis of Johnnie Cochran's defense strategy in the O.J. Simpson case is eminently worth

reading; too bad the dog this tail is wagging won't hunt. Rosen briefly discusses the role of class in the Simpson saga, but never the role of money: Just how many black millionaires does he think there are who could even hypothetically afford as skilled a "storyteller" as Cochran? As opposed to, say, the number of poor—and poorly defended—black men convicted on sketchy evidence by jurors who never question the official version of events? Furthermore, Rosen's imaginative attempt to link a celebrated public travesty to a few virtually powerless radical academics (as well as to pop music and the movies, those perennial destroyers of civilization) could only make sense on some other planet, one where political power isn't entirely monopolized by the center-right, one where a president

JOHN JUDIS: HOW THE JAPANESE SAVED CLINTON



and House speaker from nominally opposing parties aren't fighting to take credit for taking food from the mouths of poor children.

ANDREW O'HEHIR
New York, New York

To the editors:

In his excellent review of eight books on critical race theory and the O.J. Simpson case, Jeffrey Rosen asserts that prosecutor Christopher Darden "... had come from a more disadvantaged background than any other lawyer in the Simpson case..."

I would argue that Darden was privileged in comparison with Johnnie Cochran, regardless of the contemporary class or financial status of their families in California. Here's why:

Johnnie Cochran was the son of a north Louisiana share-cropping family. To go to a (legally) segregated high school, he had to live with a relative in Shreveport.

Chris Darden, nineteen years younger, was born in California to a mother who

had lived there since age 7. His knowledge of the Jim Crow South was second-hand. And that may help to explain why he was able to share Marcia Clark's idealistic view that a nearly all-black jury would look at the facts objectively.

In a narrow 100-mile corridor along U.S. Highway 80 from Mineola, Texas, to Shreveport, Louisiana, a number of black families greatly improved their prospects by joining the World War II-driven migration to California. Chris Darden's grandfather and the singer Johnny Mathis's father, Clemmie Mathis, worked as domestics for some of the same Gilmer families before leaving for northern California defense industry jobs.

Johnnie Cochran's father may well have sold them insurance, or tried to. And Mineola is where San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown attended a segregated high school before moving on to California by way of Dallas.

I await the writing of a book on how the loss of so many capable black families affected the Ark-La-Tex (to use the television marketing term). What they've meant to California is easily traced in the daily news.

SARAH GREENE
Publisher, The Gilmer Mirror
Gilmer, Texas

Yew.S. ally

To the editors:

Jacob Heilbrunn's "Yew Turn" (December 9, 1996) takes exception to the fact that a number of eminent intellectuals and policymakers in the United States see reason and strength in Singapore's approach to organizing society and conduct of foreign policy. Singapore works.

Heilbrunn asserts that "these advances have not made Singapore any friendlier to the United States." Heilbrunn is dead wrong. Singapore has been and still is the most articulate advocate of a U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific. Singapore is the eighth-largest export market for the U.S., and Singapore offered base access facilities to the U.S. military when the Philippines wanted the U.S. out of the Subic Bay and Clark Airbase.

There is no harassment of American journalists in Singapore. Singapore's actions against *The International Herald Tribune* and Christopher Lingle are not anti-American. These journalists made serious, libelous allegations against Singapore government leaders. Actions were taken against them following the due process of law, and they had every opportunity to defend themselves.

There is no Singapore strategy to "create together with China a new system of 'Asian values' against the West." Singapore and some Southeast Asian coun-

tries have articulated their desire to preserve those values in their societies which are their sources of strength even as they absorb and adopt values from the West that have helped them in their economic and technological progress.

JEAN TAN

*First Secretary (Information),
Embassy of the Republic of Singapore,
Washington, D.C.*

Political climate

To the editors:

It is amazing how different the world looks when you are sitting in sunny, southern California. Ronald Steel ("Mission Creep," November 25, 1996) seems to believe that (1) Russia is completely benign and (2) the original Visegrad states (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) are interchangeable in their behavior with the Balkan states. In overcast Budapest, however, (1) Russia still appears menacing (just ask Moldavia) and (2) in terms of establishing democratic institutions and norms, and in developing free market economic systems, at least three of the four Central European states (Slovakia is the exception) have far more in common with their western neighbors (Austria and Germany) than with their eastern and southern neighbors.

Steel seems to believe that by incorporating the Visegrad four into NATO, the alliance will be signing up for protracted disputes involving local, ethnic or border disputes. With the possible exception of an ongoing dispute between Hungary and Slovakia concerning the treatment of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, and the building of a controversial dam on the Danube, these countries have endeavored greatly to solve the problems that have divided them (see for instance, the historic treaty between Romania and Hungary signed this fall). This is more than can be said for those two NATO stalwarts Turkey and Greece.

The bottom line is that these countries have from day one been promised the opportunity to join NATO if they behaved properly. With the exception of Slovakia, they have all done so, and it seems clear to me, at least, that Slovakia will not make the first cut. The governments and the populations of these countries almost uniformly support membership. For these reasons alone, NATO should be morally obligated to make membership available. Of course, like Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, we could promise the support and protection of the West only to withdraw it at the moment of greatest need.

NICHOLAS J. KABCENELL
Budapest, Hungary

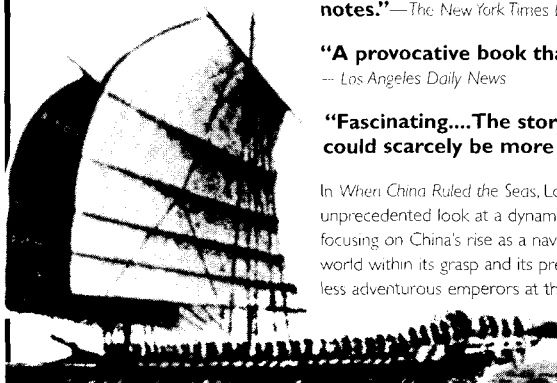
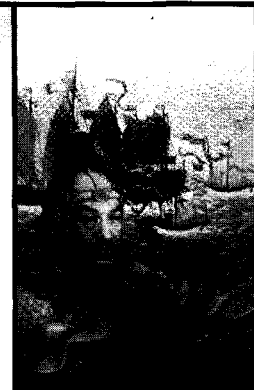
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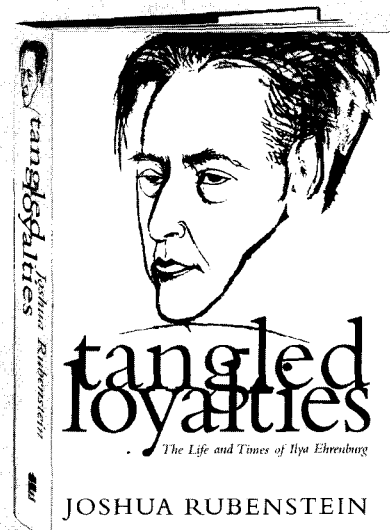
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FROM WASHINGTON

The goodwill scam

I am myself, of course, filled nearly to the brim with goodwill to all men. Well, that isn't quite right. I possess a good deal of goodwill to a great many men. No, that's still a bit off. I am imbued with a measurable amount of goodwill toward a majority of men. No, no, still not there. All right, now: I feel a large degree of goodwill toward an extremely small group of men and a mild degree of goodwill toward a slightly larger but still relatively minute group; on the other side of the divide I feel a mild degree of ill will toward a like-sized group in the middle and an almost limitless degree of ill will toward an extremely small group at the far end of the spectrum. Taking into account all the men toward whom I feel any degree of will, good or ill, the whole bunch amounts to something well under .0000000001 percent of the male population. For the remaining 99.9999999999 percent, I really don't feel much one way or the other. Nothing personal. About women I am a little more expansive—I have three sisters, a mother, a wife and a few more female friends than male—but not enough to change the moral-statistical reality. I'd say I approach the desired standard of goodwill to all only in the case of children, and even there I am afraid I could be tested by, say, a stint as a shopping-mall Santa.

I'm not peculiar, at least not in this regard. Nobody really cares equally about everybody. If they did, the world wouldn't work. And everyone knows this. But there is a notion, which has gained some currency over the past few thousand years, that, during this season, for a few numinous weeks, we should pretend otherwise, in honor of He who really did feel goodwill to all men. It's a bit of hypocrisy to the good, the argument goes. I don't think so.

For one thing, the season of goodwill is an active cause of suffering. It's commonly said that the depression and irritability that afflicts many people at this time of year has to do with the

stress imposed by close contact with family members. That may be one factor, but a far greater one is the aggravation caused by the mass pretense to altruism. Life brings us constantly into contact with people we cannot stand, often for excellent reason. This is always upsetting, but normally we are allowed at least the comfort of acknowledging, openly to ourselves, and by various signals, implicitly to our enemies, the reality of our hatreds. In the season of goodwill, we are denied even this minor balm. For weeks, we are obliged to exhibit warm wishes to people we do not like at all: hostile (and unhostile) vagrants in the street, killer bicycle messengers on the sidewalk, infomercial hosts, line jumpers at the movies, cell phone-talkers in restaurants, lawyers, meter minders.

A few years ago, I went to the annual White House Christmas party for the press. I doubted very much that the president and his wife wanted me there. I had recently written a long piece on Hillary Rodham Clinton that had not been kindly received, and I had written uncharitably of her husband as well. But they had to invite me anyway, since I was a credentialed member of the White House press corps, and anybody with a credential gets invited to the Christmas party, including reporters whom the first couple have every personal reason to regard as mean, low, vicious, prying gutter-snipes. The Christmas party, after all, is a celebration of goodwill to all men.

And because it is the season of goodwill to all men, the president and the first lady are obliged to stand still for three hours under bright lights and shake hands with, and pose for photographs with, the aforementioned gutter-snipes. Which group, I am ashamed to admit, included me in 1993. I still have the picture. There is Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Clinton and Mrs. Kelly and Mr. Clinton, four dear old friends. Neither my wife nor I look very comfortable, but the Clintons look like they are in pain. And of course they were. The pretense of fondness was torture. December is the cruelest month, thanks to goodwill to all men. The following year, I resolved to do what I could to lower the level of cruelty. In 1994, I went to the party, but I skipped the presidential receiving line, so the first couple would

at least be spared from seeing me. Last year and this, I dropped out altogether. It's my own small act of goodwill.

There are weightier reasons than the mere alleviation of human suffering for opposing goodwill to all men. There is the matter of sin. The whole thing is perilously close to blasphemy. Adopting the pretense of goodwill to all men isn't honoring Christ, it's assuming Christ's role. Limitless love and boundless forgiveness: that is His job, not mine. As the theologian Lyle Lovett has observed, that's the difference between God and me.

And not just between God and me. Between God and most people. I know a couple of saintly souls—people who actually go some distance toward the Christlike ideal of hating the sin and

loving the sinner—but most people are no more capable of this than they are of winged flight. Actually, the evidence suggests there are many more people who hate the sinner but love the sin than the other way around. The drunk wallows in his drunkenness, the adulterer in his fornication. It's only sin in the abstract—sin committed by others—to which most people object.

Well, the argument goes, aspiring to Christly behavior is better than not aspiring to it, even if you fail to reach the goal. So, the season of goodwill is erring in the right direction. This would be true, if aspirers to universal goodwill were forthright in admitting their failure. But I suspect most of them aren't. I suspect they assure themselves that they are indeed overflowing with the stuff. They are, in short, faking it. And faking doesn't make them better people. It makes them liars, that is, sinners. Universal goodwill is a leading cause of seasonal sin. At least the sinner who admits he just can't hit Christ's standard commits the virtuous act of telling truth about himself, to himself and to God. The faker fails even at this. What is more, in falsely assuming Godly qualities, and in (no doubt) rewarding himself for his pretense with bounteous amounts of self-congratulation, he is in a sense honoring a false god—himself. He is a Yuletide self-idolater. So repent, ye of goodwill. If you are feeling particularly warmly these days toward bike messengers, get your iniquitous ass to confession.



MICHAEL KELLY

JANUARY 6 & 13, 1997

MIRACLE ON FIRST AVENUE

A month ago, fourteen members of the U.N. Security Council voted to grant Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali a second term. One member, the United States, vetoed it. From the peace academies and institutes of international goodwill came howls of outrage. "Clumsy, stupid and scandalous," said Robert McNamara, who knows such adjectives intimately. As one administration official told TNR, "We were truly and completely isolated on the planet."

But 'tis the season of wonders. And last week, as the man who called the people of Sarajevo privileged cleaned out his desk, the United States watched the world line up behind its candidate, Kofi Annan of Ghana. Boutros-Ghali's protectors, the French, protested, demanding that his successor be an African from a Francophone country. (They seemed little bothered that, since no more than 30 percent of the people in any of their former colonies speak French, there are, strictly speaking, no Francophone countries in Africa.) When Annan's supporters noted that he does, in fact, speak French, the reply from Jacques Chirac's ambassadors was predictable and swift: not well enough. But finally, on December 13, as a French spokesman defiantly vowed that "France is not a country that is susceptible to pressure," France did what France does best, and caved.

A small blessing, one might say, this victory for the proposition that linguistics should rank behind competence and morality as principles of international relations. But on a Security Council of which France remains a permanent member, not that small. After all, some scholars of Central Africa truly believe France armed the genocidal Hutu government of Rwanda, and then tried to block aid to the Tutsi rebels who defeated it, because the rebels, having lived in exile in Uganda, generally spoke English.

And there are other blessings. The standoff over which African should reign on the East River had a lot to do with the American presidential campaign and the French ego. But it was also a skirmish over policy toward the world's poorest continent. The French position, put simply, is that African governments need more aid. And France gives considerably more (as a percentage of GDP) than does the United States. America's is that aid is of little use without democracy, and that, since much of France's beneficence consists of military training for the

thugs who protect autocrats and salaries for the civil servants who bloat money-losing state industries, Africans might be better off without it. Boutros-Ghali, who condemned the West for its miserly giving while embracing the African tyrants who dined on it, stood firmly in the French camp. This spring, for instance, he sent a mission to Nigeria that endorsed as "sincere" the pledges of General Sani Abacha (the man who keeps Nigeria's elected president in prison) to return his country to democracy.

Once it became clear Boutros-Ghali would not serve a second-term, France floated three successors (Amara Essy of Côte d'Ivoire, Hamid Algabid of Niger and Ahmedou Ould Abdallah of Mauritania). Each cut his diplomatic teeth representing the kind of authoritarian regime with which France feels so comfortable, and the election of any of the three would likely have introduced the world to another African Secretary-General sympathetic to Jacques Chirac's contention that democracy is a "luxury" African countries cannot afford.

By contrast, Kofi Annan hails from a country, Ghana, that does not have a former colonial power to subsidize its experiments in statist economic policy or to send gendarmes to save its leaders from their own people's discontent. Perhaps not surprisingly, it has over the last fifteen years launched radical free-market economic reforms scarcely conceivable within the French zone of influence. And last month Ghana did something else its French-dependent neighbors virtually never do: it held a genuinely democratic election.



Kofi Annan, to be sure, is largely a creature of the U.N. bureaucracy in which he has made his career. But he has shown a refreshing propensity for un-U.N.-style bluntness about the regimes that run his continent. In a recent *Le Monde* interview, for instance, he suggested that many African leaders refuse to send their troops on peacekeeping missions abroad because they "probably need their armies to intimidate their own populations." If he continues with such rhetoric as Secretary-General, he will soon find himself distinctly unwelcome among France and its African cronies. But Congress, which is hoarding billions the U.S. owes the U.N., might respond favorably to an outbreak of truth-telling in midtown New York. And citizens on the continent that most needs it might as well. •

NOTEBOOK

LAKE WOEBEGONE: In an effort to rescue his troubled nomination to head the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake has been apologizing to Republican senators for concealing the shipment of arms from Iran to Bosnia in the spring of 1994. "I think there are serious questions," said Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter. The policy was "duplicious," huffed Alabama's Richard Shelby. "It crossed the line." Nonsense. Lake didn't cross any lines. The shipment, which was not illegal, amounted to a covert wink at Iranian support for the beleaguered Bosnians. And it helped Bosnia and Croatia recapture the territory without which even the imperfect Dayton agreement would have been impossible. Given the refusal of both the Clinton administration and its Western allies to drop the arms embargo on Bosnia, Lake and Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott took an end run by sanctioning a slightly sneaky policy. Would Republicans have preferred that the Clintonites prevent any arms from being shipped to the Bosnians? Anyway, the notion that Congress should be informed of every last foreign policy maneuver is the same tired partisan game Democrats used to play in the 1980s. There are legitimate questions about Lake's performance as head of the NSC. There are also legitimate questions about his ability to run the CIA, indeed about anyone's ability to run the CIA, which is in a state of collapse. But they hardly center on Bosnia. Lake's ability to carry out a secret policy is, in fact, the one thing in his favor.

THE OLD SCRIPT: The prime minister of Israel shows sympathy for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the critics gather, and fancy, condescending letters are signed, the president of the United States makes a criticism of his own: an old script is back. So let us be clear. The decision by Benjamin Netanyahu to declare that his government would work to expand Jewish settlements in the West Bank was not, as President Clinton gingerly put it, "helpful in making peace." It was a gesture to comfort the rightward wing of his coalition, and it has instead largely comforted the enemies of Israel and of peace. But let us be clear about something else as well. The steps and the missteps of Netanyahu's government are not the main factors working against peace. The main factor is the quite deliberate, quite relentless effort by Yasir Arafat and his band of unmerry men to cripple and delegitimize Netanyahu, in hopes of encouraging a softer and more gullible Israeli presence at the negotiating table. In September, Arafat incited Palestinians to riot on a cynical pretext (the opening of a new door to a tunnel near the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem). And the old terrorist got what he wanted: a Western foreign policy establishment that is overwhelmingly anti-Netanyahu reflexively blamed the prime minister for the fight the chairman of the PLO had started. Netanyahu's

decision to expand existing settlements in the West Bank, or at least to allow them to grow, has given the usual suspects a chance to pile on again, a chance for which they had been lying in wait. On December 15, eight mandarins of the American foreign policy establishment—including James Baker, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Cyrus Vance, Robert Strauss and Lawrence Eagleburger—sent Netanyahu a public letter condemning Israel's "unilateral actions" against the peace process. The White House, which openly supported Netanyahu's opponent, Shimon Peres, in the last Israeli election, rushed to say, count us in. The establishmentarians' mischievous was couched so as to appear to be giving the government of Israel friendly advice. But the advice is not friendly, which is not a surprise, since some of the signatories, notably Baker and Brzezinski, are by no stretch of the imagination Israel's friends. When, precisely, did Robert Strauss start caring so passionately about Israel's well-being? At the heart of the letter's hypocrisy is the refusal to acknowledge, as Henry Kissinger said in refusing to sign it (for the record, George Shultz didn't sign either), that Netanyahu's Likud government was elected "with a mandate different from the previous Labor government." It was a mandate for peace, but for *reciprocal* peace. Compromise, said Israeli voters tired of being blown up at the bus stop, cannot be one-sided. These self-appointed judges of the peace process are not especially interested in coming to terms with this, or with the realities of the situation: the unmodified and apparently unmodifiable expectations of the Palestinian camp, the Egyptians who egg on the Palestinians, the Syrians who rejected even Peres's fulsome offers of peace and who are now making noises of fresh belligerence. The mandarins make much of the delayed Israeli withdrawal from Hebron. But, as Peres himself has revealed, Arafat has not at all been eager for Israeli deployment from Hebron. He has stalled because he is reluctant to take on Hamas in its stronghold in Hebron, and because he wishes simultaneously to hold Hebron over Netanyahu's head. And Israel's helpful friends ignore the complexities in the settlements issue itself. The truth is that Israel has not embarked on any new settlements, and its cabinet has turned down several proposals for new settlements. What it has done is to allow for the natural growth of established Jewish communities, just as there is natural growth in Palestinian communities. The Oslo agreement put no restrictions on this sort of organic increase. Most disgracefully, Prime Minister Netanyahu's would-be advisers ignore this fact: nearly three and a half years after the famous White House handshake, the Palestinians have not yet been able to bring themselves to issue the one document promised as a *de minimis* concession to peaceful coexistence with the Jewish state—a statement asserting that they no longer aim at the destruction of Israel.

NUMEROLOGY: For the record, the last issue of TNR was mislabeled. Our December 30 issue should have been tagged Volume 215, Number 27. •

$SOB=MC^2$

Albert Einstein taught the world about the relativity of things, but now it seems the benevolent image he projected to humanity may have been relative as well. Einstein had a darker side, and it appears in personal letters that were put on display to the public for the first time last week in Jerusalem.

—*The Chicago Tribune*,
November 17, 1996

Geneva
July 23, 1927

Dear Planck,

I am so very cross with Heisenberg. He messed up all my clothes and linen this morning while making some foolish point about indeterminacy. He protested when I asked him to leave my room, so I had to give him a thrashing [*verdreschen*] with my walking stick. As he made for the door, I yelled after him, "Come back here so I can hit you again!" But the coward fled.

I explained all this to the police—how Heisenberg had provoked me and how, if anything, he deserved a sterner rebuke than he had received. One constable was extremely sympathetic, but in the end they let him go.

Just wanted to warn you what sort of a mood he's likely to be in if you should hear from him.

Warm regards,
A. Einstein

Geneva
July 24, 1927

Dear Heisenberg,

As I was attempting to explain to you before you flew off the handle [*aus dem Häuschen*] yesterday, God simply doesn't play dice. To give you an example, Schrödinger and I were having beers on the rue du Mont-Blanc the other day when I turned to him and said, "I just realized I haven't any money on me." "Neither have I," Schrödinger replied. Suddenly we were approached by a blind beggar. "Kind sirs," he said, "won't you please help me feed my family?"

I exclaimed, "Of course, my good man," and reached into his tin as if to make a donation. In reality I removed twenty pfennig, precisely the sum Schrödinger and I needed to pay

for our beers.

Now what do you suppose is the likelihood that this man should have appeared purely by chance? Don't you think this speaks pretty strongly for an orderly universe?

Of course, when I put these questions to Schrödinger, he said we could always have stiffed the waitress.

Bring me a new walking stick and all will be forgiven.

Yours,
A. Einstein

Princeton, New Jersey
November 15, 1933

Dear Bohr,

Too bad I was unable to meet you in New York. I would have been there except for an unpleasant experience on the drive over from Princeton. You see, an elderly woman changed lanes ahead of me in such a manner as to force me to brake rapidly. Determined to teach her a lesson, I pulled in front of her and slammed on my brakes. Then I flipped her the bird [*Vogel gegeben*] for good measure. I'm sure you will agree that a crumpled rear bumper was a small price to pay for the revocation of the old biddy's license. But I still feel a burning anger inside of me whenever I recall the incident.

Yesterday, after having the bumper repaired, I was inspired to change the oil. Dumped the used motor oil into the Delaware River. No one seemed to mind. How I love this country!

Yours,
A. Einstein

Princeton, New Jersey
December 1, 1933

Dear Freud,

Do humans have an innate lust for destruction and war? I know I do. As I was telling Bertie Russell, I'm only a pacifist to attract babes [*junge Mädchen*]. Bertie said, "Whatever you're doing, keep on doing it—you look marvelous." I said to Bertie, "Do you think my hair stays like this by itself?" and I recommended some products. He said he'd look into them.

Toodles,
A. Einstein

Princeton, New Jersey
December 14, 1933

Dear Freud,
Yes, you are right—war is hell. Now

would you please send me some more nose candy [*Nasenkandis*]. It's not for me, mind you, but for my friend S - - - - - , who pays me a pretty penny for it. You will be happy to know that the money I am able to raise in this fashion helps me buy new equipment, both for my laboratory and for my sideline of making and selling erotic postcards of undergraduates.

Enclosing latest catalog, *The Babes of Physics*.

Regards,
A. Einstein

Pasadena, California
April 10, 1936

Dear Planck,

An interesting development in my discussions with Schrödinger. While visiting Cal Tech last week, he and I went bathing at Santa Monica Beach. As we lay on the sand, he stared out at the ocean as if in a reverie.

After perhaps a quarter of an hour, he broke his silence. "Notice the curious interplay of the waves," he said. "Sometimes they join together and reinforce one another. At other times they cancel one another out, as if they had never existed."

I remarked, "Look at the hooters on that one."

Schrödinger acted as if he hadn't heard my witticism, or even seen the luscious [*zaftige*] bathing beauty who crossed our path. Sometimes I think the man is a complete pansy. And, as you know, I hate pansies. Also people with disabilities. And Native Americans.

With warm regards,
A. Einstein

Peconic, Long Island
August 9, 1939

Dear Schrödinger,

I am as convinced as ever that your wave representation of matter is an incomplete representation of the state of affairs.

But perhaps I can be persuaded otherwise if you put something up my nose.

Yours,
A. Einstein

DAVID BRITTAN

DAVID BRITTAN is a senior editor of M.I.T.'s *Technology Review*.

NATIVITY SCENE

By Tom Dunkel

The police won't cut baby Jesus any slack. When Rita Warren, a 69-year-old gadfly religious activist who lives in the nearby Virginia suburbs, pulls up to the entrance of the U.S. Capitol, the guards play it by the high-security book. They poke a metal detector under the chassis of her 1981 Oldsmobile station wagon. A bomb-sniffing dog checks out the almost-lifesize figures of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the three wise men, a shepherd and two sheep crammed inside the car.

"How you doin', Rich?" Warren calls out to one guard. "Have a nice weekend?"

"It was quiet," says Rich. "The baby was sick. Flu."

The Olds is clean. Rich gives the okay, and Warren glides through the checkpoint, as she has been doing regularly for seventeen years.

It's Christmastime in Washington. Congress has adjourned, lunch reservations can easily be had even at the places Larry King frequents, the national Christmas tree glimmers across the street from the White House. And Rita Warren, the ever-affable crèche lady, is making her annual nuisance of herself. In her own quiet way, Warren is as much a fixture in Washington as David Gergen. Most of the year, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., you can find her on the East Portico steps of the Capitol. A six-foot Jesus mannequin by her side, her boombox blaring religious music, she showers tourists and members of Congress with God's apolitical love.

That's the basic June-to-September routine. In December, Warren returns to the Capitol for a special two-week holiday run. The Jesus mannequin gives way to a ten-piece crèche, which she augments with a jumbo "Happy Hanukkah" card, a battery-operated lighted wreath and a wooden sign that reads "JESUS OF NAZARETH: LOVE, HOPE, PEACE" in Russian and English. Jim Nabors croons "The Lord's Prayer," and Luciano Pavarotti, Kathie Lee Gifford and Mario Lanza belt out seasonal hymns from the boombox. On Christmas Eve, Warren and her 12-year-old granddaughter Jessica keep a noon-to-midnight nativity scene vigil. "I honor God, and what better place?" says Warren, an Italian immigrant and lapsed Catholic who belongs to no particular congregation. "The whole world comes here, and the whole world sees it."

The holiday season is to Rita Warren what sweeps

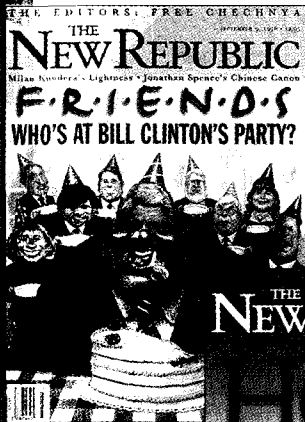
week is to a TV executive: a crucial chance to grab lots of people's attention. Besides her Capitol crèche, she owns four smaller nativity scenes that she likes to offer for display in places presided over by people who dread being dragged into freedom-of-religion brouhahas. Rita drags them in regardless. She is currently involved in high-profile controversies with both the state of Virginia and Fairfax County. In 1995 she was allowed to place a crèche in the Virginia Statehouse. In December 1996, though, a legislative committee rescinded permission for that year, citing security reasons and the "historic and aesthetic qualities" of the statehouse. Governor George Allen promptly declared there was "room at the inn" for Warren's crèche in the waiting room outside his office. Similarly, last year Warren got approval to put a crèche outside the Fairfax County Government Center, which earned her live TV news coverage. Now, the county has tightened its regulations, declaring only county residents can file crèche applications.

Such nativity scene battles are, of course, a holiday hot-potato tradition. In mid-December in Pennsylvania, for example, two Republican commissioners had been trying to fulfill an election pledge to put up a nativity scene at the Allegheny County Courthouse until the Ku Klux Klan said they wanted to contribute a cross. A similar case in Columbus, Ohio, inspired the 1995 Supreme Court decision on religious display. Under that ruling, a display such as a crèche is generally considered a protected form of free speech so long as it's been erected in a recognized public forum, under the auspices of a private group. If, however, all petitioners—be they the Ku Klux Klan or Rita Warren—aren't given equal access to that forum, or if the government plays any role in sponsoring a religious display, there are grounds for a lawsuit. In short, package your nativity scene as a celebration of the First Amendment, as opposed to Christmas, and you're in good constitutional shape. Curiously, the evolution of nativity scene law has had a minor-miracle side effect: Rita Warren and the ACLU have become allies. With her homey crèches, Warren established a public-forum precedent at the Virginia Statehouse and the Fairfax County Government Center. And once a free speech door is forced ajar, the ACLU likes to see it remain open. The Virginia ACLU is now coming to Warren's defense in court.

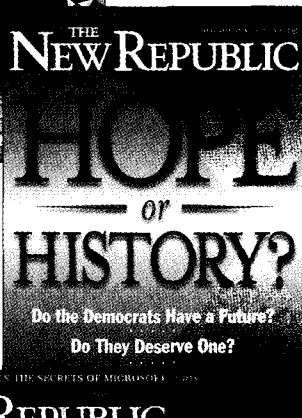
Through nearly thirty years of grass-roots activism, Warren, who keeps her distance from the Christian Coalition and what she calls religious "fanatics," has perfected a kill-'em-with-kindness approach. In 1969, she played a key role in reinstituting silent prayer in the Massachusetts public schools. In 1983, she screened Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* on the steps of the U.S. Capitol every weekend for six months in an attempt to get NBC to rescind its decision not to show the film that Easter, as they had in previous years. "She has always been a sort of cheerful civil militant," says Barney Frank, one of several congressmen of varying political stripes who consider her a friend.



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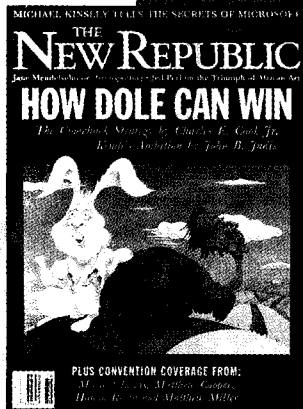


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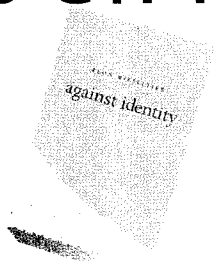
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No question, Warren has more friends than money. She lives with her two adult daughters (one severely retarded, the other a divorced mother of two children) in a modest two-bedroom apartment. A retired television factory worker, Warren lives on her \$200 monthly Social Security check and the grace of God.

God talks to Rita Warren, even in her sleep. One morning, at 3 a.m., He whispered "Oldsmobile" in her ear. The next day Rita walked into the nearest Oldsmobile dealership and convinced the owner to give her a free car. It was God, too, who told her to set up shop on the Capitol steps, so that passersby might gaze upon her Fiberglas baby in a manger and think, "This is Christmas." Apparently He has whispered in Rita's ear again.

"The White House. That's gonna be next," she declares gleefully. "They have the Christmas tree. They should have a nativity scene."

TOM DUNKEL is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C.

The coming budget cop-out.

SCROOGE FOR OMB

By Matthew Miller

With the president and his reconstituted economic team meeting daily to finalize his next budget, we've arrived at yet another defining moment in the Clinton era, and this one matters. The five-year fiscal blueprint Clinton unveils in the days after the State of the Union will etch his true legacy for the history books. The good news, as Clinton's hour of decision draws near, is that the odds for bipartisan agreement look good. The bad news is that the deal Clinton seems set on making will ensure that he's remembered for having abandoned progressive ambition in favor of a glib but timid mediocrity.

How has Clinton reached this grim crossroads? By letting the defensive politics he had to practice after 1994's GOP romp dictate his agenda even now, with his resurrection complete. Recall that after Clinton spent two years resisting an explicit balanced budget goal, the GOP called his bluff with a credible plan in 1995, and he embraced the idea for tactical reasons. The Clinton plan was devised with election battles in mind. His (slightly) smaller savings in Medicare prepared the ground for successful demagoguery; his heavy reliance on nameless cuts from capping domestic spending (like the GOP) looked tough while ticking off no one. With an eye to the stump, Clinton also left the Pentagon, Social Security and anything like a tax off the table. And he offered no new spending save a pledge to spare from the ax such pet

programs as Head Start, environmental enforcement and student loans. Inside the White House, however, the fact that such public investments had been deferred and half the budget left off the table were not viewed as the last word. These were "1997" issues, to be revisited after the work of winning was done.

Now that the votes have been counted, Clinton has a chance to seize back the policy initiative. But, beyond out-sized rhetoric, he won't. The White House plans only tiny revisions to the final budget package they offered during last winter's negotiations. Thanks to a better interest rate and growth outlook (for which Clinton deserves some credit), plus lower Medicare and Medicaid forecasts, getting to balance is easier. By Congressional Budget Office reckoning, the projected deficit that needs to be eliminated in 2002 has dropped from \$280 billion last May to \$150 billion, once you figure in the payoff from enacting a credible plan to achieve balance. The administration will use this good news to try and hit balance by 2002 under the official (and still more conservative) CBO assumptions. And the administration will try to do this without resorting to last year's biggest frauds: when Clinton papered over weaknesses in his budget plan by saying tax cuts would be canceled and extra spending cuts "triggered" later if needed. The administration's budget will also fund the few low-cost campaign pledges Clinton made—such as health coverage for kids (a cheapie: kids don't often get expensive illnesses) and token subsidies to help employers hire welfare mothers.

Unfortunately, to square even this modest circle while leaving half the budget off the table, something had to give. At press time, the chief casualty looks to be the usual one—integrity on Medicare. Even with new OMB Director Frank Raines wanting to revisit last year's plan, sensible premium increases have been ruled out. And, amazingly, Clinton is planning, as of this writing, a *bigger* reprise of a shell game he used last year to extend the life of the Medicare trust fund, shuffling even more "part A" hospital services now funded by the trust fund onto "part B," paid out of general revenue. Why go this route? For reasons too dull to detail, it's the only way Clinton can claim his Medicare savings this time are smaller than last year's proposed \$124 billion while also extending trust fund solvency a full decade. In other words, he's doing it for the soundbite.

Obsessive political calculating is only the most obvious reason for this timidity. The more subtle cause is that officials come to believe their own talking points. If you'd just spent a year screaming that you're "protecting Medicare, Medicaid, education and the environment," and "balancing the budget consistent with our values," you might think your plan is a good one, too, instead of only slightly less bad than the other guy's. Even Gene Sperling, the in-house champion of "public investment" just named to head the National Economic Council, isn't fighting the old fights anymore. One official explains that "dramatic new proposals wouldn't work," since they'd upset expectations all round. Exactly.

Once Clinton's budget goes to the Hill in early February it faces a month or so of Republican payback.

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**NEW IN TRADE
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We'll be treated to GOP shock at the president's insistence that Medicare be cut, and to charges that he's still using gimmicks to avoid serious reform. Clinton's tiny corporate subsidy cut will be assailed as a tax increase; asset sales that fortuitously bring in cash in 2002 will be picked over; and then, around the end of March, things will get serious.

The incentives for a deal remain high. Neither side wants a repeat of last year's standoff. Senate budget chief Pete Domenici, 64, wants his legacy; he's won a final term, but is said to feel that with a deal this year he might go home early. John Kasich, who under House rules is in his last term as budget committee chair, is similarly motivated. And the departure of Leon Panetta, the White House's indispensable man, actually improves the odds. Republicans view Panetta as a dangerous partisan whose budget acumen snookered Gingrich and Kasich last time.

A few Republicans argue privately that beating Clinton up not just for six weeks, but all year—and thus not reaching any deal beyond stopgap funding until 1998—would be better politics. "It's unquestionably advantageous, if they can get away with it," says Nebraska Democrat Bob Kerrey. "If you're just trying to expand a [GOP] majority in 1998," Kerrey adds, "you blame the president on the budget; pass the balanced budget amendment, a flag burning amendment, and a partial birth abortion act; and make [John] Huang the poster boy in campaign finance hearings 'til we're all sick."

But the GOP hasn't forgotten that it disastrously lost at this sort of brinkmanship in 1995, and, besides, no one wants to delay the pain until an election year. So, for once, there may be a breakthrough. Much, of course, remains unknowable: Will negotiations start before the GOP puts out their own budget blueprint? If not, will gun-shy Republicans vote to cut Medicare and taxes more than the president—and place their necks in the noose once more? Such questions will dominate the news this year and may lead to a deal much like the one that slipped away last winter. If the media cover and bless the deal on these traditional terms, however, they'll miss the real story.

The real story is the death of our society's ability to devote money to new public needs, a situation that some (but only some) Republicans find pleasing, but which a Democratic president has a duty to redress. Clinton pretends this isn't happening, and argues instead that he has a plan for training or welfare or crime. He doesn't, but the White House is betting that the media are too dumb about numbers to know the difference.

Here's what's really slated to happen, under Clinton's proposal, the Republican counterproposal, and any deal in between. The federal government, between now and 2002, will cumulatively spend an incremental \$1 trillion above what it spends today. Virtually all of it will go to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, military and civil service pensions, and interest on the debt. That's it: next to no growth in spending for cities, schools, expanded health coverage or other combustible social problems where money would make a difference. And

this is *before* the baby-boomers retire. At the same time, tax subsidies that favor big companies and the well-to-do will cumulatively rise more than \$300 billion.

Clinton's much-touted initiatives, therefore, operate at the margins. He's earmarked \$3 billion over five years to help subsidize state welfare-to-work efforts for a million people. He'll restore \$13 billion over five years to remedy the welfare bill's \$46 billion in unacceptable Food Stamp and legal immigrant cuts. Meanwhile, most domestic programs will be cut up to 15 percent or more in inflation-adjusted terms; Clinton priorities will keep pace with inflation, and no more.

So the ambitions of the only second-term Democrat since FDR are now clear: if Head Start (at \$3.9 billion) can only fund half of eligible kids today, he'll make damn sure it can still fund half as we enter the twenty-first century. Some bridge.

There is another option. The president could still cancel his staff's holiday, get everyone back in the Cabinet room and start over. That option is to see the "vital center" not as a rhetorical smokescreen that lets devastating trends continue, but as a bolder synthesis that's at once more liberal *and* more conservative than current antagonists. It means spending more on new public investments than Jesse Jackson dares call for, while balancing the budget faster than Newt wants to—by 2000, not by 2002. Financing such a plan requires means-testing the major entitlements programs and tax subsidies, adopting the Boskin Commission's fix for the CPI, and adding a gas tax to boot. Sperling, meanwhile, would know how to spend a fresh \$100 billion over five years. One place to start is a national move to shrink class size in early grades modeled on Pete Wilson's big-spending new program in California.

With Clinton having already cut the deficit from \$290 billion to \$107 billion in four years while keeping growth steady, there's no economic reason to wait longer to finish the job. But there is reason to hurry: though our deficit is now lower as a share of GDP than other OECD countries, our overall savings rate—the reason deficits matter—remains a fraction of theirs. Since no one's sure how to raise these low savings rates, most economists say we should actually run real budget surpluses (i.e., counting Social Security) by decade's end to boost savings and growth before the costly age wave hits.

What's the alternative if Clinton is looking to history? Maybe he thinks that balancing the budget Republican-style by 2002 will make the world safe for Democrats to dream big again. But by then, on the eve of the baby-boomers' retirement, it may be too late to do anything but cope. So when Clinton's inaugural and State of the Union addresses sound gorgeous, watch the numbers. Clinton's battle with their grim meaning is what defines him. In 1993, hamstrung on spending, he complained furiously that they'd made him an Eisenhower Republican. Then, to win an election, he played a Republican on TV. Finally, unless his plans change, there's the saddest postscript of all: he's embraced Republicanism as his ambition. You start by coopting the other side, and end up coopted yourself. •

PROBABLE CLAUS

By Stephen Glass

Last year, two days before Christmas, Jerry Buttle was nearing the end of his best year yet as a shopping mall Santa. He was averaging more than twenty-five kids an hour, up from the previous year's record twenty-one. The line of eager children equipped with voluminous lists snaked farther than he could see down the Wisconsin shopping center's hallway. At about 7 p.m., a ruddy-faced fourth-grader hopped onto his lap and began listing the dozens of gifts he wanted for Christmas. Then, just after asking for a video game, he shouted: "Mommy, Santa has a boner!" He began singing over and over: "Santa has a boner, Santa has a boner!" A deep silence spread all the way to the back of the line. Then, just as suddenly, the chatter started up again as parents told their kids it was time to go home.

Buttle is 83 years old. "Trust me. I haven't had one in a long time," he says of the erection in question. "He must have felt my belt buckle." Buttle now uses rope to hold up his red pants.

An isolated episode of humiliation for one old man, a small change in tradition, rope instead of a belt. But incidents like this one are just the beginning for Santas across the country. Playing Santa has always had its unpleasant side (you try spending a month as a human armchair to several thousand overexcited, grubby, greedy, sticky, crying, shrieking, occasionally incontinent children and see how full of Christmas cheer you feel), but playing Santa in this neurotic age is a truly fresh hell. Once assumed to be kindly—if perhaps slightly eccentric, boozy or otherwise not conventionally employable—old men, commercial Santas are now widely assumed to be potential pedophiles. No longer celebrated only in secular hymns and saccharine movies, Santas are the subject of a forthcoming paper by a child advocacy group on how to guard against child molesters. The climate of suspicion has spawned an entire industry of Santa advisers. One Chicago-area school for Santas featured a 144-page textbook that provided instruction on everything from going to the bathroom in a Santa suit to rules on how to touch children. The country's other major Santa school and company, Santa Plus, offers a shorter handbook that repeats this rule twice: "Always be aware of the placement of your hands while children are on your lap. Both hands should be clearly visible at

all times." And Santa's bosses are taking this sort of stuff very seriously. The witch-hunt that has devastated the daycare industry in recent years has made a deep impression on others who work closely with children. Fearful of lawsuits, criminal charges and bad publicity, mall executives are erring on the side of skittishness.

This is all big news in the Santa world, a world with unique customs and traditions, and one that is unaccustomed to even the slightest change. Ever since Thomas Nast's mid-nineteenth-century illustrations limned the modern Santa Claus, Santa's image—bearded, rubicund, wholly benign—has stayed pretty much the same. "Look, we're in the memory business, so normally things don't change much around here," says Robert L. Riggs Jr., whose family business, Missouri-based Santa Plus, rents more Saint Nicks than anyone else in the country. "Santa Plus has pretty much been doing the same thing since the 1940s." When Santa has changed, he has done so slowly and cautiously, moving far enough behind the curve of social change that alterations have been uncontroversial; a case in point is the move in the past few years to offer black Santas and, more recently, Hispanic Santas. Until a short time ago, the only real controversy in the Santa business was in the 1970s, when costume shops trying to reduce dry-cleaning costs switched from rabbit- to fake-fur trim.

Starting about four Christmases ago, though, shopping mall executives—under pressure from insurance companies—began demanding tighter control over jolly old Saint Nick's baser instincts. In many malls, this has meant relatively subtle changes, like requiring that Santa undergo drug testing, and that he wear white gloves so that his hands are more visible. But, increasingly, Santa's overlords have begun to demand much more. In the Midwest, children's advocates have been successful in pressuring malls to adopt a whole new Santa tradition. Three Illinois malls instructed their Santas to be "more down-to-business" and refrain from smiling since St. Nick's traditionally jolly demeanor could be "misinterpreted."

A mall near Omaha, Nebraska, last year took steps to do away with physical contact between Santa and child almost entirely. Instead of sitting on his throne and receiving children on his lap, Santa was tucked away, like Lucy the shrink in a *Peanuts* comic, behind a

booth. Children sat on their parent's lap, facing St. Nick, the barrier between them. If they wanted to hand him their letters or wish lists, they could do so—through a mail slot. For a photo op, Father Christmas would shake a child's hand, but there was to be no clambering onto his lap for the traditional picture. The new scheme proved so unpopular that the mall has since returned to the time-honored Santa throne.

Across the Atlantic, Santa fares little better. England, whose Victorian age gave rise to the notion of Saint Nick as an innocent dispenser of universal love for children, has, like the U.S., begun to regard the old boy more as a fur-clad groper than a *pater familias*. This November, for the first time, several of England's department stores declared Santa's lap or knee off-limits unless an adult supervised.

And children's advocates say they want even more restrictions. The executive director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence believes all Santas should be fingerprinted. The Child Welfare League of America says there should be a national registry of Santas. "What we need are some regulations," explains Mary Davidson, the dean of Rutgers University's School of Social Work and a prominent advocate for children. "The question we must ask ourselves is, who is screening the Santas?"

But if child-care alarmism had at least some roots in reality (there have been a few cases of child-care workers molesting children), the great Santa Scare is 99.9 percent hysteria. The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect hasn't recorded a single case of a Santa molesting a child. In fact, there is apparently one little-known case in which a Santa was found guilty of a minor sex offense. In 1990, a 14-year-old girl accused a Santa at the Lake-forest shopping mall in Gaithersburg, Maryland, of fondling her breasts and buttocks while she sat on his lap, posing for a photo with five friends. A judge found him guilty, though the three elves working with him testified that they had been watching and saw no evidence of impropriety.

Some experts say Santas may actually be the safest population since they are constantly being photographed. "What [the demand for restrictions is] doing is drawing attention away from the real problem. It's making Santa the fall guy," says Richard Gelles, director of the University of Rhode Island's Family Violence Research Program. "If you worry about Santa, you forget to worry about Uncle Harry." And an abusive Uncle Harry is far more common—only 6 percent of child abuse is committed by strangers. Douglas Besharov, the first director of the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, fears that many men will avoid the Santa business altogether. "It's a great loss for the men and for the children. Children need to be touched.

People need to be touched," he says. "It's a reality that men want to be careful, so they are progressively having less and less physical contact with children."

The Santa scare may not be saving children, but it is having one real effect. It is discouraging Santas and frightening them into treating children in a more distant, and even peculiar, fashion. While no one has historical data on how many Santas are quitting, one retired South Carolina Santa, Richard, began informally keeping track last year. Richard, a 78-year-old Santa who claims his last name is Claus (he also says his answering machine announces that he is unavailable because he is feeding the reindeer), is convinced the scare is encouraging more and more Santas to get out of the racket. "If this keeps up, the next generation will have no contact with Santa," he says. "Get your pictures now," he forecasts solemnly, "they'll be collector's items."

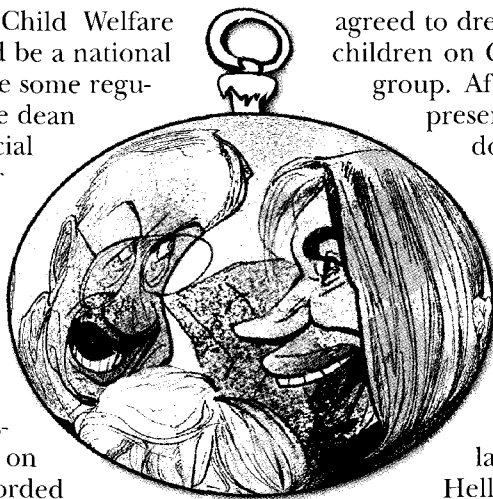
Take 59-year-old Ronald Culver. In 1968, Culver, then a mechanic in Gary, Indiana, grudgingly agreed to dress as Santa and deliver gifts to poor children on Christmas Day for his wife's church group. After he delivered the first wrapped present (he accidentally gave a boy a doll) and a hearty "Ho! Ho! Ho!,"

Culver was hooked. For twenty-seven years, in nine cities, he worked the night shift in shopping centers. But last summer, when a Florida mall called to confirm his regular slot, he told them to find a new Father Christmas. Last year, Culver's mall prohibited kids from sitting on his lap. "I thought I'd do it 'til I died.

Hell, if I got through the commercialization, I figured I was set for life," Culver says. "But when they swapped the throne for a bench.... I knew the magic was done with."

Unlike Culver, some Santas have agreed to stay on board only if they can modify their costume to avoid any perceptions of child abuse. For many, this simply means streamlining the suit's cuffs, so Santa's hands are more visible. But a few Santas have gone further, and weirder. After an Illinois Santa noticed that his white-gloved hands appeared to blend into a child's white shirt in a picture, he began wearing rhinestone-studded aqua-blue mittens. Likewise, a Miami Santa has been wearing sunglasses ever since a parent accused him of giving his 3-year-old daughter "the eye."

Richard is horrified by the more creative solutions. In October, he founded the Union of Concerned Santas and Easter Bunnies. The group fights malls that tinker with tradition, but promotes sensitivity training for Santas. In its upcoming newsletter, the child is segmented into green (safe, like shoulders) and red (dangerous, like chests) touch zones. "If they could invent safe sex," Richard says, hopefully, "then, Ho! Ho! Ho!, we'll make safe Santa-sitting." •



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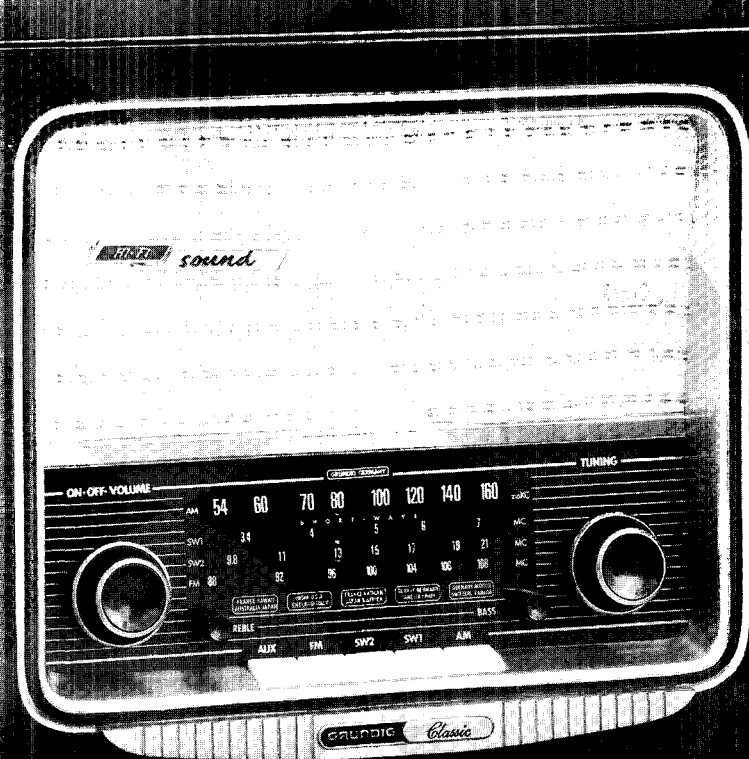
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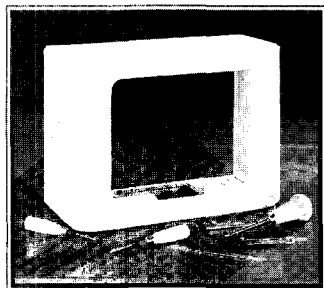
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DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD

By Romesh Ratnesar

The images have become as cloyingly familiar as they are starkly beautiful: tightly framed, black-and-white shots of children and old people flash across the television screen in slow motion, their eyes gazing out at us with pain and longing. The sedate strains of John Lennon's "Imagine" loop in the background. The advertising pitchman's voice-over: "Imagine—if every time you bought anything with your American Express card, you helped feed someone who is hungry." The words "Charge Against Hunger," emblazoned on a white soup bowl, appear on the screen, and as the picture fades to the AmEx corporate logo, two more words pop up. "Do more."

As in spend more. The ad is a promotion for American Express' Charge Against Hunger campaign, which the company launched four years ago. It sounds elegantly simple. For every purchase made with an American Express card between November 1 and New Year's Day, the company has pledged to donate three cents on each transaction, up to a maximum of \$5 million, to the Washington, D.C.-based anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength. It is, to all appearances, the consummate win-win marriage of altruism and profit: since 1993, this annual Yuletide charity drive has helped raise \$16 million for hunger relief, while unapologetically encouraging card members to put more of their holiday purchases on plastic.

Not surprisingly, the competition is catching on. In November, Visa kicked off its own year-end promotion, promising a \$1 million donation to the nation's largest children's literacy program, based on purchases made with Visa cards. In launching the "Read Me a Story" campaign, a roadshow-style, sixty-one-city bus tour, Visa executives told the press that this Christmas consumers would, given the choice, place literacy above hunger relief. "This message of children's literacy," one company vice president boasted to *Brandweek*, "is more universal, more positive, and it will have a broader appeal."

Corporate charity is nothing new, but it has always been one of the less pure forms of giving. Businesses give on what might be called the biblical theory of commerce, figuring that casting a relatively modest (and tax-deductible) amount of bread upon the water

will reap returns manyfold, in the form of free publicity and consumer goodwill. But in recent years corporate charity has become something on the order of a business in itself, a specialty filling its own market niche, where a CEO's philanthropic inclinations are focus-grouped, market-tested and hyper-promoted. The non-profit partnerships established by American Express and Visa are only two examples of the tie-ins that bright marketing types have devised to promote a company's products by projecting a responsible, socially conscious image. And 'tis the season for ulterior motives—retailers of all stripes are luring in spendthrift holiday shoppers by appealing to their better angels. Sears plans to donate \$200,000 from Sears Card transactions to Gilda's Club, a national group that opens meeting places for cancer patients and their families. At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, Neiman-Marcus's holiday catalog offered its most conspicuous consumers the chance to put up a minimum \$35,000 bid for a lifesize replica of a Star Wars jet. The store donated the difference between the minimum and the ultimate winning bid of \$135,001 to Steven Spielberg's STARBRIGHT foundation, which links up hospitalized children through the Internet.

PR executives have a telling name for this kind of self-interested goodwill: they call it "cause-related marketing" or, more honestly, "strategic philanthropy." This new, strategic way of giving began in 1983, when AmEx coined the first of these terms to describe its underwriting of the Statue of Liberty restoration project. In the mid-'80s, hip, progressive companies like Ben & Jerry's showed that beneficence sells. Other, larger companies followed, tying financial commitments to targeted social causes. Now companies carefully search for the next hot social cause, market it alongside their own products, and then proclaim their social conscience to any customer who will listen. "In the past, perhaps the wife of the CEO was particularly concerned about Alzheimer's, so the company would donate money to that cause," says Carol L. Cone, CEO of a Boston consulting firm that helps companies design cause-related marketing schemes. "The big sea change came when companies realized that this is actually corporate strategy. Now, the question about a charity is, can it support corporate business?"

These days, cause-related marketing is as valuable to many companies as a glamorous spokesperson might have been in the past. This year alone, American businesses spent close to \$600 million on ads and events trumpeting their commitment to social concerns. And executives are unsentimental about what they want in return. A 1995 survey commissioned by Cone's firm asked company bosses to identify their chief motivations for conducting cause-related campaigns. Ninety-three percent answered "to build deeper relationships and trust with customers," 89 percent said "to enhance a reputation or image," and 50 percent admitted "to increase sales." Only 39 percent picked "because senior management believes companies must stand for something." And it's true, the new corporate charity can do wonders for business. A case in point: the fix-it-yourself warehouse chain Home Depot donated \$250,000 in materials last year to a non-profit home-building group called Christmas in April. So grateful was the group that it subsequently spent twice that much on still more Home Depot goods. Meanwhile, American Express saw its fourth-quarter profits jump by 15 percent last year in the midst of its anti-hunger campaign. "We wouldn't continue to do it," says company spokesman Gregory Tarmin, "if it wasn't good business.... I feel absolutely comfortable saying that."

And why not? If corporate America has found a way to make generosity profitable, what's not to like? Nothing, really. But there is something a bit—well, humbuggish—about such ruthlessly methodical charity. For one thing, companies understandably steer their efforts toward fighting those social ills their customers regard as the most compelling. So some causes are more equal than others. In October—Breast Cancer Awareness Month—companies ranging from Avon to General Motors to Boston Market rolled out promotions that funneled a portion of proceeds to breast cancer research. Women, cause-related marketers believe, are more likely to develop affinities with particular companies based on their non-business activity. As in presidential politics, soccer moms are prime targets for corporate philanthropy's narrowcasting.

So are children. As part of a program it calls "Book It," Pizza Hut gives public school students coupons for personal pizzas when they finish reading a given number of books. Of course, even if Johnny can read, he probably won't come to redeem his coupon unaccompanied by a hungry adult. "It's been a blockbuster for them," says Cone. The same goes for Nabisco, which in 1995 changed the shapes of the cookies in its Barnum Animal Crackers boxes to those of various endangered species. The company donated five cents from the sale of every box, up to \$100,000, to the World Wildlife Fund. "Since it was a learning tool, it seemed perfect," says Ann Smith, a spokesperson for Nabisco. "Kids and animals go together, and kids and cookies go

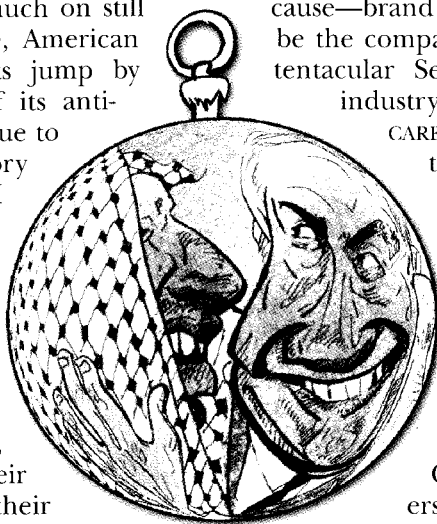
together." Apparently, so do kids and profits. Sales of Animal Crackers jumped 20 percent over the course of the two-year campaign.

To be fair, profit motive isn't the only thing driving corporate do-goodism. Sometimes companies are motivated by an even more primal instinct: self-preservation. Through association with a noble cause, the most blackened corporate image can be burnished. In April, U.S. Tobacco, maker of Skoal and Copenhagen smokeless tobacco, pledged to donate \$1 million from snuff sales in 1996 to the National Volunteer Fire Council—a worthy but somewhat improbable bedfellow, especially since tobacco, when rolled in paper, lit and smoked, is a leading cause of household blazes. The Exxon Corporation, no favorite of environmentalists since the *Valdez* disaster, has joined with the National Fish and Wildlife Fund to create the Save the Tiger Fund and plans to kick in \$5 million to the effort over five years. (The fund also helps another cause—brand building—since the tiger happens to be the company's corporate logo.) Starbucks, the tentacular Seattle-based coffee chain, has won industry accolades for its partnership with

CARE, an international relief organization that has, among other things, provided clean water systems to villagers in rural Guatemala. But as investigative journalists Jon Entine and Martha Nichols wrote in *The Chicago Tribune* in June, Starbucks began the campaign only after suffering from revelations in 1994 that the purportedly values-driven company was buying beans from Guatemalan suppliers who paid workers as little as \$2.50 a day. Even American Express' holiday hunger-fighting drive arose in part to soften the negative image created by the company's battles with Boston restaurateurs in the early 1990s, when merchants irked over the card's exorbitant fee structure stopped accepting it. "The company realized it had to become more flexible," Tarmin says. "We were humbled by what happened in Boston."

And there is, finally, the matter of just how small all this largess really is. With retail business booming, even the most generous holiday campaigns amount to a minute fraction of what the biggest companies will take in this season. Visa's literacy campaign, for instance, is heavy on the marketing but a little skimpy on the cause. The company spent \$10 million on an advertising blitz for the program that featured actor Danny Glover, which is \$9 million more than what it plans to donate in the first place. The Saturday after Thanksgiving, Wal-Mart displayed the spirit of the season by donating the day's receipts to charity. What shoppers might not have known is that the giveaway lasted only from 7 a.m. to noon, when many turkey-stuffed patrons were probably just rolling out of the driveway.

And one last point: it's not altogether surprising that



the rise in cause-related marketing has coincided with a decrease in traditional charitable giving by corporations. A recent report by the Conference Board, an association of businesses, found that corporate charitable contributions as a percentage of pretax income have fallen from 1.78 percent in 1987 to 1.24 percent in 1995. And if Americans spend as liberally this Christmas as they did in 1995—and there is every indication they will—then American Express' much-praised \$5 million donation to Share Our Strength will amount

to a paltry 1.3 percent of the firm's total fourth-quarter earnings. Meanwhile, the company gets the same tax benefit it would have gotten had it simply given the money to Share Our Strength rather than building an advertising campaign around giving it: the entire sum of money the company donates as part of its Charge Against Hunger is tax deductible. For the socially conscious card holder who actually *makes* the charge against hunger, on the other hand, there's no such tax break to be had. Bah humbug, indeed. •

Larry Flynt, scum chic.

HUSTLER

By Hanna Rosin

"Words such as respectable, insightful, and icon are spilling from the tips of some decidedly unexpected tongues."
—from the introduction to an interview with Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler*, in the July 1996 issue

James Carville, having run through his patter of Ken Starr jokes, suddenly grows somber. "Milos Forman lost his parents in the Holocaust," he says, introducing the Czech director who will introduce the new movie the Washington establishment has gathered to watch, *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. "The first thing a totalitarian state goes after is pornography, and when they do, the public applauds. It gets worse from there." Carville's wife, Mary Matalin, rests a fidgety hand on her fur coat. George Stephanopoulos stops throwing popcorn and catching it in his mouth. *The People vs. Larry Flynt* is meant to be consumed with grave import, and it is; the post-viewing crowd mingles in subdued tones. Carville, who has a large-ish ranting role in the movie, says later that this reaction is a measure of his vehicle's subtle, nuanced nature. "Like they say in wine tasting, the movie had a long finish," he explains. "I can't imagine anyone going to see that movie and not stopping for a cup of coffee to talk about it."

The Christmas movie season is Hollywood's time for thinking large about large subjects. In the summer, it may be all sex, drugs and violence, but the winter solstice is a serious time, and it calls forth serious cinema about, well, sex, drugs and violence. But not pointless sex, drugs and violence. Sex, drugs and violence with a message—two thumbs up not from Joe Bob Briggs but from Frank Rich. This Christmas, pond scum is intellectually chic. Larry Flynt, once merely a millionaire publisher of vile, racist, scatological, pig-ugly and vio-

lently women-hating porn, has arrived, finally, at respectability's doorstep. Dredged from the sump just in time for *Hustler's* twenty-fifth anniversary, the old slimemeister has been retrofitted as a hardscrabble defender of American freedoms. It's a transformation that longtime *Hustler* regulars watch with some awe. "I once wrote a couple of pieces for *Hustler*, and I used to dread that David Broder would see them," says Rudy Maxa, who covered the Flynt saga for *The Washington Post*. "It wasn't so chic back then. Now if I say at a dinner party I'm one of Larry Flynt's best friends, I get a lot of interest. I get a big kick out of it."

In between coast-to-coast signings for his new autobiography, *An Unseemly Man* ("I can't keep track of him," frets his agent), Flynt is juggling calls from "ABC, NBC, MTV, print press, magazines, it's absolutely overwhelming," she frets yet again. And the coverage is respectful, almost reverential: "the most timely and patriotic movie of the year," raves Frank Rich in *The New York Times*. Barry Hannah, in a breathless profile in *George* (which is holding a private screening) is nearly silenced by admiration: "Flynt and I are the same age, and when you see him you feel, in the fight for freedom, a relative coward." Hannah leaves us this question to ponder: "Was Flynt our hero?"

You don't have to be Catharine MacKinnon to smell something fishy here. It's not, as MacKinnon or William Bennett might argue, that Flynt's magazine should be boycotted for corrupting young minds. And it's not that he doesn't deserve credit for fighting and winning, in the 1988 Supreme Court decision *Falwell v. Flynt*, one of the most important freedom of the press case since *New York Times v. Sullivan*. But our hero? In their desperation for a resounding liberal epiphany, the

media seem to have swallowed Flynt's glossed-over image of himself. "We are talking about freedom!!" Woody Harrelson's Flynt screams at a group of reporters in one of the movie's endless portentous moments. "Doesn't anybody know what that means anymore?!" Script direction: "The reporters are silent. Larry is all choked up."

Crucial to the new Flynt mythology is faith in the movie's unstinting honesty; the idea that his new acolytes have bravely plumbed the abyss that is Larry Flynt's soul and have unflinchingly exposed this horror to the moviegoing public. "What makes this movie so effective is that it doesn't sentimentalize or airbrush Larry Flynt," writes Rich. Forman says he strove "not to glorify any of [Flynt's] life. I didn't try to cover the ugly side." The scriptwriters, Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, are adamant on this point. "I don't think anyone will accuse us of whitewashing here," says Karaszewski. "As purists, we try to be honest."

Excuse me? What about, to start with the most obvious, the whitewash of shaving 200 pounds off Flynt and chiseling him into Woody Harrelson? "We knew we needed a real star because the subject matter was so strange," admits Alexander. "The studio would not have been comfortable if we had gone with Tom Arnold."

There must have been many things that made the studio uncomfortable. The movie opens with a barefoot and freckled 10-year-old Larry peddling moonshine to the locals in eastern Kentucky (script direction: "Larry is backwards, dirt poor, barely educated, yet bursting with Huckleberry Finn industriousness"). Soon he parlays his entrepreneurial vigor into a series of go-go clubs. The clubs are skanky, but they are also just this side of cool. He pays his girls well and treats them with respect, except for the occasional pat on the bum. He loves girls; in fact, it's because the female body is the most beautiful of God's creations that he wants to share it with his fellow man. The central drama is the love story of Larry and Althea, his soulmate and muse. It's a story about what a mischievous but good-hearted young man has to do to make it in a tough world, and what he learns along the way about liberty, the Constitution and the inalienable rights of man. Basically, it's an updated Capra flick: *Mr. Juggs Goes to Washington*.

In the movie, *Hustler* is almost accidentally in the nude business (which is, by the way, presented as pretty innocent). Its real mission is social progress. It is engaged in the noble task of "breaking taboos": publishing nude pictures of Jackie O., a cartoon of Dorothy and the Tin Man having sex, and interracial orgies. And it is engaged, too, in the artist's calling of showing life as it is: *Playboy*'s hairless bunnies are replaced by working girls spreading it all under the bright lights. "God made the genitals. Who are we to say they aren't beautiful?" asks Woody/Flynt.

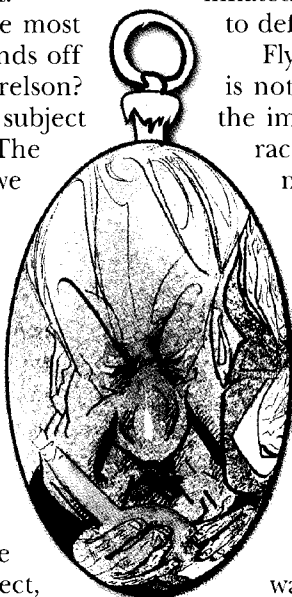
But what distinguishes *Hustler* is not its bare-all

daring—the adult section of any newsstand is full of lesser-known titles brimming with genitalia—but its relentless depiction of sex as beastly and of sexual creatures as beasts. Sex in *Playboy* is a barefoot romp in the park. Sex in *Hustler* is a freak show. The magazine's pictorials are violent, depressing and perverse. The objects of sexual desire are often chosen precisely for their unwholesomeness. They mock and debase the very idea of the female body as sacred: women smeared with excrement, 300-pound women, women with penises—a horror house of Diane Arbus rejects. *Hustler*'s preferred sex toy is a pile of shit. There is a running joke ad called "Buttweiler Beer—the King of Smears," showing a woman's firm, sexy behind with diarrhea dripping down her leg. Couples have sex by smelly urinals, a man masturbates while watching a fat woman pee. As Flynt writes in the September 1994 issue: "the desire to prick a pompous inflated bimbo is perfectly natural." (Yes, and so also to deflate a pompous prick.)

Flynt's venomous, bestial depiction of the world is not limited to women. What fits least well with the image of Flynt as liberal icon is the unbridled racism in *Hustler*, also left out of the movie. The magazine's pages are filled with pictures of fat-lipped black men—Negroes, actually—stuttering in semi-literate English or waving their oversized manhoods. In one, a smirking Louis Farrakhan chomps on watermelon while watching two white women make it. In another, a Negro picking cotton in the antebellum South waxes prophetic: "Payback's a comin'," he says. "Two hundred years from now we'll sell 'em drugs and make their daughters hos. Then they'll be our slaves."

So what? Art is complex. Truth is ugly. The way of progressivism is not for the faint of heart. And so on. But the idea of Flynt as a man whom good liberals must regard as heroic falls apart for another reason: the facts of Flynt's own life. When, as noted in the movie, Flynt described himself as a "scumbag," it was rare modesty. Flynt has led the sort of life that gives sordid a bad name. If all you knew about Flynt came from Milos Forman, you would get the impression that Althea was the only woman he married. You would also get the impression that he passed most of his days winning over juries with impassioned speeches on the First Amendment. In fact, Althea was the fourth of Flynt's five wives. And the story of Flynt's serial marriages is an unenlightening one. Flynt's boot-strap autobiography maintains a calm, sentimental tone throughout ("I made a lot of mistakes..."), except when it comes to his ex-wives. First there's Mary, a blonde he met at a bar in Dayton. Only after they were married did he learn, to his horror, that he was "the only one in the place who hadn't screwed her!" Then there's Peggy, the girl-next-door type. She turned out to have "the morals of an alley cat."

One viewer of *The People vs. Larry Flynt* who knew a



bit about the subject beforehand is Tonya Flynt-Vega, who is 31 and one of five children whom Flynt fathered but didn't live with. This summer, Flynt-Vega publicly accused her father of sexually abusing her. Flynt, calling his daughter "a habitual liar," has denied the accusation. His daughter won't divulge the details, making it impossible to know what really happened. But she says some of her other stories ring painfully true. Like the time Flynt sent her and her mother, who were living in public housing, a Christmas card with \$500. Inside was a picture of Santa exposing himself to a little girl. Flynt says he never sent the card. "This movie makes *Hustler* into a coffee-table magazine," Flynt-Vega says. "It lifts my father up as some kind of American hero, like Jesse James or Bonnie and Clyde. He's very manipulative, and he's just bought himself a respectable place in history."

Flynt's angry daughter is right about the movie. Forman's supposedly harsh examination of Flynt's life is really as soft and gauzy as a *Playboy* bunny shot. Even the fact that Flynt was a drug addict is presented with apologies. There is a brief interlude where an increasingly haggard and bloated Flynt ingests handfuls of pills and watches his wife do the same, but, as we learn later, it was only to dull the pain after he was shot. As soon as the pain is over he quits, "cold turkey." The movie ends with a teary, grieving Flynt, watching home videos of his dearly departed Althea. Forman excuses himself for his dishonesty. Artistic license and all that. "Bio pics are boring," he says, explaining why he left certain incidents out. But what Forman chose to omit is the central (and, incidentally, more interesting) truth of Flynt's life, and what he chose to include works to mitigate against that truth, in favor of what's politically apt.

As it happens, Forman's airbrushing of Flynt works against the core intellectual defense of Flyntism. Flynt's worshipers argue that accepting the grim, grubby reality of Flynt is the whole point. Flynt (and *Hustler*), they say, is the authentic voice of working-class America. "If you had a provocative magazine and it appealed to more educated people, it was all right," writes philosopher/movie star James Carville in the latest issue of *Hustler*. "But for blue-collar people to have this was less desirable. One thing to ponder. Are the masses entitled to as much provocative art and provocative magazines as the elites are?" Carville's view is shared by a certain breed of feminist, the vampish kind that gets a thrill from seeing Camille Paglia surrounded by her bodyguards. One such person is Laura Kipnis, who has just published *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, with a chapter devoted to *Hustler*. The author's photo shows a dreamy-eyed Kipnis leaning back on a Turkish pillow, her hair tousled, her billowy blouse wrinkled and undone.

Kipnis upbraids her feminist colleagues for one of their most "formative blind spots": class. *Hustler*, she argues, "rants madly" against privilege, making it "by far the most openly class antagonistic mass-circulation

periodical of any genre." She chalks up its grossness to "Rabelaisian transgression," a triumph of carnivalesque inversions: "the out-of-control, unmannerly body is precisely what threatens the orderly operation of the status quo." And we would all see its value if we gave up our prudish "insistence ... [on] high-minded language."

But to accept Flynt's vision of the working class is, to say the least, condescending. Flynt invents a cast of blue-collar characters—buck-toothed sex maniacs, peeping Toms—and then spits on them. His working class has no aspirations outside the four walls of their truck beds. They mock American institutions and dream of nothing more than they already possess. Flynt actually disdains the working class, and his disdain shows in his lifestyle. He wheels around his mansion in an \$85,000 gold-plated wheelchair and marvels at his French provincial and eighteenth-century English antiques, Persian rugs and faux Old Masters. He likes to brag to reporters that his average reader is 28 and has a median income of \$50,000. He thought they were Joe Lunchbox types but was surprised in a recent survey to find he had more highly educated readers. "Ph.D.s must be more open-minded," he says. Thus, *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

That Milos Forman should have an exaggerated impression of Flynt's heroism is understandable. After all, he points out, the two brutal regimes he lived through, the Nazis and the communists, "started with crusades against perverts." But for Frank Rich or Barry Hannah to repeat this mantra is stunningly empty. After all, Larry Flynt's story does not prove America is a dangerous place, but the opposite. There has never really been anything close to a real threat to Larry Flynt's liberty or his peculiar pursuit of happiness. Each time a narrow-minded Southern judge fined him or threw him in jail, the decision was overturned on appeal. He warns, and others repeat, that he was sentenced to twenty-five years. But he only served a few days, and, as he gloated at the time, his circulation skyrocketed. The court case on which Forman's entire movie is based was not even a censorship case. The very title of the movie is a lie. The case wasn't *The People v. Larry Flynt*. It was *Falwell v. Flynt*. It wasn't, in other words, an effort by the state to censor free speech. It was a libel case (much like the libel case Flynt plans to pursue against his daughter), an effort by one citizen, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, to prove that another citizen, Larry Flynt, had lied about him in publishing a parody interview in which Falwell talks about having sex with his mother. Flynt didn't go to court to stop the totalitarians from starting down the slippery slope of censorship. He went to court to protect his bank account. In doing so, he accidentally protected the right of free speech. That's not particularly brave or heroic. The real protectors of American rights are rather boring. They're a few dour justices and the Constitution that guides them. But that wouldn't make much of a movie. •

THE HARD QUESTIONS

The disenfranchised

An election like our last one, in which only 49 percent of eligible citizens bothered to vote, poses a series of questions for democrats. Who are the non-voters? Why have they dropped out of, or never joined, the political process? Do we really want them to join? If so, what should we do? The most interesting of these questions is the third—and answering it should help, one way or the other, with the fourth.

It's not obvious that we (voters) should want the non-voters to vote. If they don't care, why encourage them to cast what is likely to be a careless ballot? If they are alienated and angry, maybe their voluntary disenfranchisement is a good thing. A democratic system can handle only so much rage, resentment and frustration; if at least some of the people most radically scarred by these emotions drop out, aren't they doing the rest of us a favor?

Liberals and leftists once believed that it was poor people, mostly, who didn't vote. Increase the size of the electorate, they said, and the balance of political power would shift leftwards. Maybe so; Americans below the poverty line do vote at something like half the rate of those earning the median income. But many more poor people vote in all the European democracies, and the right still wins elections. The truth is that a lot of the Americans who don't vote would support conservatives or right-leaning populists. After all, many of the Christian evangelicals were once disconnected from the political process. The non-voters are an unknown quantity. Indeed, that is one good reason for trying to engage them politically.

The problem is that many of the non-voters—perhaps especially the long-term non-voters—are not only disengaged but also unaffiliated and unorganized. They have not been educated by a political party or movement; they have little or no experience of the discipline of collective action. We don't know how to identify or categorize them. Voting, of course, is a solitary act: we protect and celebrate its privacy. But it also reflects shared experiences, interests and values. That's why we can fairly easily identify groups of voters that have a strong statistical tendency to

vote a certain way—the Reagan Democrats, say, or urban blacks. We agree or disagree with the choices of these groups, but we recognize them as fellow participants in the political system: we know how to take them into account.

Some members of these organized groups vote in every election; others come and go. But we know, pretty much, how to draw them to the polls—and we know the likely consequences. In 1994, for example, voters from union households made up only 14 percent of the electorate. In 1996, they made up 23 percent of a larger total—a major increase brought about by a well-planned and well-financed campaign. The Democrats would have done much worse in congressional elections last November without those additional union-educated voters. They are a predictable group: about three-fifths voted Democratic in 1994, a little more did so in 1996.

The reason for bringing in the unaffiliated and unpredictable non-voters is that we need to know more about them. Their experiences, interests and values need to be registered in the political process so that politicians can speak to them, and organizers and missionaries of many different sorts can reach out to them. The danger of ignoring them, leaving them on the political margins, is that they will come in suddenly, wrathfully, responding to demagogic appeals when the country is in the midst of a crisis.

The experience of Weimar Germany is worth thinking about here—even if we are, as I believe, very far from any such extremes. The voters most resistant to Nazism were Social Democrats and Catholics, longtime participants in, or supporters of, especially well-organized parties. Hitler drew support from all the other parties, but also from previously inactive, politically passive and unidentified men and women. A surge of new voters in 1933 brought disproportionate gains to the Nazis (but voting rates were consistently in the 70 to 80 percent range—the U.S. today is another world).

The standing argument for increasing the number of voters—the argument that shaped, say, the “motor-voter” law—is simple: more is better. But this isn't entirely convincing. Certainly a democracy is stronger if more of its citizens are politically engaged, but the strength depends on the engagement. “Motor-voter,” much celebrated by those who argued it was America's onerous registration laws that held down turnout, did increase the number of people regis-

tered to vote, but it didn't increase the number of engaged citizens or, as it turned out, the number of citizens actually voting. It's a good thing, I suppose, to make registration easy, but that is no substitute for a political campaign like the one the AFL-CIO ran this past year. Similarly, Jesse Jackson's efforts to mobilize black voters in the 1970s produced an increase in both registration and voting. The Jackson campaigns were educational for at least some of their participants and supporters in a way that “motor-voter” obviously isn't for anyone.

The same argument holds for the efforts of fundamentalist and evangelical churches to push their members into the electoral process. I don't much like their politics, but I recognize their appearance in the political arena as

a democratic event. And

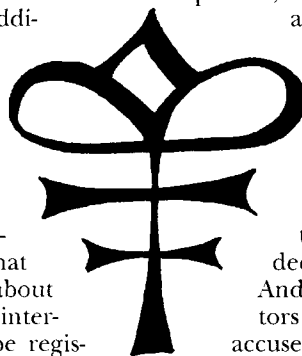
I hope that their political engagement will prove educational, that it will force them into the familiar democratic pattern of argument, negotiation and compromise. Indeed, I expect this to happen.

And when it does, the negotiators and compromisers will be accused of selling out, and some number of true believers will withdraw into sectarian rectitude and isolation. The result should be a net gain in the number of engaged citizens.

But this happy outcome requires that there be a counter-mobilization and that other new voters also be brought in—the secular masses (as I will hopefully call them). It is important that organizers go looking for them. We (secularists) need them to vote, but, preferably, only after they have begun a process of political education, so that they vote as members of associations with programs that their fellow citizens can scrutinize or, at least, as men and women in touch with such associations.

Organization and predictability are crucial to democratic politics. We focus at election time on the “swing” voters, and they are no doubt valuable citizens, prepared to be persuaded of one or another alternative position. But they are valuable only so long as there are other voters committed to and stabilizing the alternatives—and only so long as the swingers don't swing too wildly. Political activists need to have, and generally do have, some idea of what arguments might reach them, some knowledge of their interests and ideals. Our non-voting fellow citizens, by contrast, represent a potential swing vote of vast proportions, and we have too little sense of how they might swing.

MICHAEL WALZER



BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

"When in the Chronicle of Wasted Time..."

The more we learn about Orson Welles, the sadder his story becomes. In 1994, Oja Kodar, the Croatian woman who was his close companion in his later years, opened a vault of long-stored Welles film footage in Los Angeles. Together with a Slovenian director, Vassili Silovic, and a German producer, Roland Zag, Kodar assembled a ninety-minute film from that footage. (The Film Forum in New York had the U.S. theatrical premiere.) This film is heart-breaking in its unfulfillments, irritating in its idlings, ghastly in its losses and laced throughout with magic, literal and beautifully figurative.

Orson Welles: The One-Man Band (Media Res Berlin) contains japeries, conjuring acts (Welles was famous for these), shards of abandoned projects, remnants of completed but lost ones. The materials are bound together with excerpts from a Welles appearance before American film students in 1981 after a showing of *The Trial*. With these students he plays his favorite late-life role: the thwarted genius full of wry rue.

The real rue is that he *was* a genius, beginning with his very presence. With the sole exception of John Barrymore, I know no American screen actor, not even Marlon Brando, who so immediately seizes an audience just by appearing—before he begins to do whatever there is to perform. And Barrymore was not, as Welles was, a writer and a director. (A director? At his best, one of the best in world film history.) This new assemblage, like other posthumous Welles films and like some writings about him, calls both our culture and Welles

himself to account. How could the theater and film worlds of America and Europe have been so wasteful of him? How, early in his career when he was showered with adulation, could he have done so much to discourage it? How could he so early have accepted the position of outcast? True, *The One-Man Band* shows more vividly than previous accounts how he attempted to work, how he fought against idleness. But it was a fitful fight. His slide into gross obesity was a patent surrender.

In this new compilation the reasons for making some of the bits are not given. One sketch shows Welles as the naïve American client of two snooty London tailors. Another sketch is a mockery of an English stately home. Another shows him drooling outside a pastry-shop window in Vienna. (Demel's?) In another sketch he really does walk around in the get-up of a London one-man band, addressed by a bobby, a housewife and a flower vendor, all played by Welles. These snippets are fairly painful private jokes.

But there is more. Though there are no excerpts from the nearly completed *Don Quixote*, there are several from *The Other Side of the Wind*, Welles's last work, which, we're told, was virtually completed but is blocked by legal tangles. On the basis of these excerpts, it's possible to say only that they are quite unrelated to previous Welles styles. These glimpses are done with whirling cameras and stroboscopic cutting and with a sexual explicitness previously unseen in Welles. But nothing reliable can be inferred about the last film from these clips.

The pearl that makes this compilation invaluable is some footage that, I think, has been generally unknown. Around 1970 Welles prepared a forty-minute version of *The Merchant of Venice* for television. (Presumably just the Shylock scenes—something that had been done in American theater by Maurice Schwartz in the late 1920s.) We're told that after Welles had finished shooting and was about to start editing, the negatives vanished. Only a fragment remains, some of the scene in which Shylock leaves his house and bids his daughter to guard it. Welles, in full make-up and costume and with a touch of Jewish accent, plays broodingly, powerfully. Ten years or so later, for some reason, Welles filmed himself, without make-up, without accent, in a trenchcoat, doing Shylock's great speech ("Hath not a Jew eyes?"). Fragment though it is, it is more fully accomplished than all of his Othello and his Falstaff. It is a glorious moment.

In 1958, after the British premiere of *Touch of Evil*, Welles wrote a letter to the *New Statesman* about their review. This letter, not often acknowledged by biographers or critics, is a threnody on the conditions of filmmaking. First, he talks about the film artist's freedom. Responding to the charge that his picture is "a muddle," Welles says:

This is understandable in the light of the wholesale re-editing of the film by the executive producer, a process of re-hashing in which I was forbidden to participate. Confusion was further confounded by several

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Crucible. Freed of dubious modern allusion, Arthur Miller's drama of the Salem witch trials looks better. As John Proctor, Daniel Day-Lewis looks better, too, as he goes. (Reviewed 12/16/96) **The English Patient.** What a fine actor Ralph Fiennes is. He and Kristin Scott Thomas are incisive and hot in this drama of World War II that begins sanely and gets pulpy. (12/9/96) **The Portrait of a Lady.** Jane Campion takes her own particularized look at Henry James's portrait. The result is not exactly James, but it's interesting. Campion. (12/23/96) **Some Mother's Son.** Northern Ireland. The IRA hunger strike of 1981. Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan as the mothers of two activists. Very moving, but highly partisan. But very moving. (12/30/96) —SK

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

A Certificate of Failure

For many students, dropping out of school is a gradual and unintentional process. It is not so much a decision as something that just happens. A student might start staying away from school—a day here and two or three or four days there—because he just doesn't feel like going. Then, before he knows it, he's missed so many days and so much work that he figures he'll fail the year anyway. Why not just pack it in? Students who drop out are not usually thinking about how this will affect their job prospects and their future lives. Their attention is on the here and now.

Teachers and principals see this process taking place all the time and try hard to figure out how they can arrest it. Recently, Denver principal Joe Sandoval came up with a kind of shock therapy for would-be dropouts. Sandoval requires these kids to sign a certificate that forces them to look at what not having a high school diploma will mean.

According to a story by Associated Press reporter Steven Paulson (November 5, 1996), the idea came to Sandoval when he got some bad news this fall. Nearly one-third of the 1,800 students at his school, North High, had quit last year—and this was the highest dropout rate in the city. Sandoval had been struggling with the problem for some time. Several years ago, he set up an after-school program, the Welcome Center, where kids who were having trouble with their schoolwork could go for help, but that obviously was not enough.

Sandoval's new idea, a certificate of dropping out, attacks the problem in a different way. Before quitting, a student must go, with his parents, to sign the certificate in Sandoval's office. It is an official-looking document that spells out the implications of what the student is about to do, and it is about as appealing as a bucket of cold water in the face:

The undersigned student and guardian accept full responsibility for the listed student being a high school dropout. By signing this disclaimer, I show that I realize I will not have the necessary skills to survive in the 21st century.

The "anti-diploma" goes on, Paulson says, to list the skills and qualities that students can gain if they stay in school—"reading, writing, arithmetic, problem-solving, responsibility, leadership." It also puts the implications of quitting school in financial terms: Dropouts can expect to



It is about
as appealing as
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earn an average of \$585 a month, half of what they would earn if they had a high school diploma.

If, after reading the certificate of failure, a student decides that he doesn't really want to quit, he signs another form promising to stay in school. Then, Sandoval, the student, and the parents sit down and plan how to make the resolve stick, whether this involves tutoring or a change in teachers or an alternative placement.

The anti-diploma is unlikely to end dropping out in Sandoval's school, but it will certainly help those who find themselves in a mess and need a push back on to the path to graduation. It is important that the anti-diploma recognizes there is no point in keeping kids in school in order to do seat time or hang out with their friends. Staying in school has to go along with a commitment to work and improve. It is also important that the certificate forces Sandoval's students to look at the real nature of the choice they

are making. The student who quits school needs to know that he will start his adult life with a handicap that he is unlikely to overcome.

Students in the successful school systems of other industrialized countries don't have to depend on a principal's ingenuity to get this message. The systems themselves make clear to students—and their parents—the consequences of failing to attain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in an adult life. And there are real consequences for high achievement as well as for failing to achieve. Students know that the grades they get and exams they take before they enter high school determine the kind of program they will follow. And they know that grades and school-leaving exams determine whether they will be admitted to university or a technical college or get a good entry-level position or an apprenticeship.

Joe Sandoval's certificate recognizes the importance of connecting school with life. It is relatively easy to make this connection for students who are at risk of dropping out. If we want to show students that success in school also counts, there will have to be some big changes in our system, and schools cannot make them alone. Students need to know that employers look at high school transcripts when they hire and that colleges have entry standards that demand high-school level achievement from high school graduates. The connection between what they do in school and the rest of their lives must be explicit for all our students.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address Mr. Shanker at AFT, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1997 by Albert Shanker. Visit the AFT web site (<http://www.aft.org>).

added scenes which I did not write and was not invited to direct.

Rhapsodists about every frame of every Welles film don't often mention this interference. Then he addresses the reviewer's comments on his choice of subject. "I have to take whatever comes along from time to time, or accept the alternative, which is not working at all."

This new account provides a good measure of Welles's struggle to forge his own work, instead of waiting for "whatever comes along from time to time." Yet it also suggests that there was a streak in him, certified by biographers, of a longing for exiled superiority. The extraordinary artist relished, or came to relish, lolling in that easy chair before those students, basking in their adoration of a spirit too fine for this world.

Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (New Yorker) is another instance of waste—not at the Welles level, or for the same reasons, but still a pang. Chabrol knows everything there is to know about making films, and through a career of more than fifty pictures, he has sometimes used what he knows with breathtaking wizardry to some real purpose. *Landru* and *This Man Must Die* are marvels. But, unlike Welles, Chabrol has found ways to deploy his wizardry within the marketplace, and to little more than superficial purpose. He specializes in violence—not interplanetary wars or giant shootouts, just ordinary next-door-neighbor domestic gore. And by frequently reverting to this subject, Chabrol has been able to keep working. *La Cérémonie*, dexterously done, has little reason to exist except that its violence gave Chabrol a license to make it.

The production notes ask that the press not reveal the surprise ending. I can only respond: Which surprise ending? There are three of them, all equally contrived and mechanical. The film concerns a young woman, played by Sandrine Bonnaire, who gets a job as a maid in a large and lonely Brittany house owned by Jacqueline Bisset and her husband, Jean-Pierre Cassel. Bonnaire does her work well but is taciturn, reclusive. She succumbs to an offer of friendship from the pushy local post-office clerk, Isabelle Huppert. The two women thrive in joint moodiness and in sharing the secrets of their pasts, each of which contains a cruelty.

The relationship of the two women and the mood they slowly engender remind us of the true-life incident in 1933 on which Genet based *The Maids* and on which the films *Les Abysses* and *Sister My Sister* were built. But both those films, though splendidly made, missed the Artaudian poetry of Genet and were

only chronicles of pathological deterioration. *La Cérémonie* is not even a convincing chronicle. The screenplay, by Chabrol and Caroline Eliacheff from a novel by Ruth Rendell, brusquely shoves Bonnaire and Huppert from secretive weirdness into frenetic gleeful violence. This unconvincing shift seems to be there so that Chabrol could point it out to producers and thus get the money to make the picture.

Still, he made it flawlessly, and the per-

formances are fine. Bonnaire, familiar from *Vagabond*, is a bony-faced enigma. Huppert, vivacious for a change, is completely peculiar. Bisset and Cassel do decently what's asked of them. Besides the unconvincing shift of psychic gears, the picture has no theme, no resonance, no point. It doesn't even begin to generate *frissons* until very far along, and it never generates suspense. And what does the title mean? And when is Chabrol again going to do something worth his time? •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Unreal Cities

My esteemed colleague John Lahr wrote what may well be the only negative notice of the current production of *Chicago* (Richard Rodgers Theatre). And while I love a courageous dissenter, it is one of the few times I have found myself to be in disagreement with the *New Yorker's* critic. Following the finale of this splendid revival of the 1975 Bob Fosse production—a musical work based on Maurine Dallas Watkins's late '20s play, with book by Fosse and Fred Ebb, music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb—I felt the rush of which so many people speak, and which I so rarely experience myself, from America's "native artform."

Perhaps the reason for these unexpected feelings of elation was that *Chicago* exhumes the musical's forgotten roots in our truly native artforms, namely vaudeville and burlesque, at the same time uncovering the musical's neglected affinities with the great music dramas of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill. Lahr protests that *Chicago* has been done on the cheap, that it is a "bare bones" reduction not much more elaborate than the concert version performed last spring as part of the City Center's "Encores!" series. But although some of the paying customers may complain about not being able to estimate how much was spent on whirling helicopters, falling chandeliers and the other expensive toys that customarily inflate the price of Broadway spectacles, that is precisely *Chicago's* strength. John Lee Beatty's setting—an unexpected departure for a designer normally identified with Circle Rep realism—is remarkable for its elegant metaphorical simplicity. It consists of a burnished gold picture frame (beautifully lit by Ken Billington) outlining a stage largely dominated by

the orchestra in full view. The visible musicians form a traditional big band dominated by brass and woodwinds, and they are led by Rob Fisher in a variety of ragtime and jazz numbers, beginning with the rousing "All That Jazz" (a title Fosse borrowed for his semi-autobiographical film). The orchestra, in short, becomes virtually another actor in the play.

The old Berliner Ensemble production of *The Threepenny Opera* (directed by Erich Engel) placed the orchestra on stage in much the same way and for much the same reason—to reveal rather than conceal the source of the sound. *Chicago* imitates that production in exposing all the other mechanisms of the theater as well (lights, pulleys, winches, wings, etc.). Indeed, the spirit of Brecht, who was also fascinated by the anarchic traffic and criminal classes of Chicago, hovers over the entire evening. Under Walter Bobbie's propulsive direction, non-illusionistic devices abound. The titles of songs are announced (often by the music director) and the whole cast often sits on stage watching the principals sing and dance. Similarly, the narrow playing space, which has been reduced to a rectangle no wider than ten or twelve feet, forces the performers into an extreme presentational style. The direct audience address not only lobs the songs, dances and wisecracks right into our laps, but effectively treats us as members of the cast, as if we were implicated in the felonies and double-crosses of the characters.

William Ivey Long's costumes, like Beatty's set, are entirely without color—black tuxedos, black derbies and fedoras, black miniskirts, black tights, black t-shirts and slacks, black wigs. The effect is one of crispness and elegance. Even the American flag hanging vertically

over the courtroom is a muted shade of gray. The only trace of color, in fact, is a rainbow rain curtain near the end, which signals that the evening is over.

The traditional weakness of the modern American musical—and for this we have Rodgers and Hammerstein to thank—has been its inspirational book. Audiences in the past have been privileged to hear exquisite music and lyrics, to enjoy spirited choreography, to watch gifted performers. But almost invariably we have had to pay for these pleasures with stories of such stupefying triteness and characters of such cardboard nobility that all the joys evaporated. Almost alone among American musicals—I can think only of *Pal Joey*, *Guys and Dolls*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and perhaps the quasi-Brechtian *Cabaret* (also by Kander and Ebb) that match it in literary quality—*Chicago* has a book equal to its other strengths. Like those musicals, it is both good-natured and hard-boiled. Indeed, there isn't a soft spot or a sour note in its metallic body. Just compare the homicidal revelations of *Chicago*'s characters with the soupy encounter-group confessions of *A Chorus Line*, a musical that appeared in the same year as *Chicago*'s first production (and effectively eclipsed it). It is as if the two musicals belonged to two different cultures and epochs.

Chicago chronicles and almost celebrates America's lost innocence. In a town so tough "they shoot the girls right out from under you," where each crime is ballyhooed by a band of ruthless jailhouse journalists right out of *The Front Page*, six women await their trials in a Chicago prison, accused of slaughtering their lovers in a variety of ways. A more ideologically minded writer might have treated this situation as an instance of minority victimization, a paradigm of the fate of women in a brutalized male society. But *Chicago*'s "story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, and treachery—all the things we hold dear" (as the prologue describes it), doesn't distribute virtues and vices according to gender, ideology or identity groups. Apart from a falsely accused Hungarian woman who, lacking the language to defend herself, is the only person to be hanged, there isn't an innocent human creature on stage, including the matron of the prison, the reporters, the lawyers and the judge. When a character claims to have committed her crime "because none of us had enough love in our childhoods," it's an occasion for a horselaugh. What we have instead of loveless victims in disadvantaged backgrounds is "unrelenting determination and unmitigated ego." And instead of being ground up by a male-dominated judiciary system, the two central characters manage to beat their raps

entirely, albeit with the aid of a mercenary silver-tongued lawyer, who could have "gotten Jesus off if he had \$5,000."

Indeed, the women even manage to turn their crimes into celebrity careers, thus proving the prison matron's axiom that "in this town murder is a form of entertainment." *Chicago* recognizes the unacknowledged fact that celebrity is fast approaching profit as the animating motive of American life, and that show business is just another con game.

Some commentators have observed that Americans have been prepared to accept this kind of cynicism on the commercial stage as a result of such recent travesties of justice as the O.J. Simpson murder trial and the consequent self-promotion of everyone associated with it. That may be. But surely the appeal of *Chicago* has something to do with its remorseless good nature. Not since John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (on which *The Threepenny Opera* was based) has a musical work managed to chronicle the weaknesses of humankind with such engaging sangfroid and sardonic shrugs.

Chicago revolves around two "killer chorines"—Velma Kelly (Bebe Neuwirth), who exults in her criminal headlines ("Baby, you can't buy that kind of publicity"), and Roxie Hart (Ann Reinking), who shoots her boyfriend and tries

to pin the crime on her wimpy husband, Amos. The competition between these two long-legged beauties over who gets the most public attention is the meat of the plot. And when Roxie, sitting on the lap of her oily lawyer Billy Finn, mouthing his words like a jerky ventriloquist's dummy, pretends to be pregnant, Velma protests that she's stealing all her best courtroom bits ("Whatever happened to class"). Reinking, who also brilliantly recreated the Fosse-style choreography—the spider walk, the tipped derby, the hiked shoulder, the bent knees, the arched back—has been criticized for looking too ripe for the role of Roxie. She even concedes, in what may be a newly interpolated line, that "I'm older than I ever intended to be." But aside from the fact that Reinking gives a wonderfully comic performance—her hoarse whiskey voice oozes sentiment, then breaks it with a callow aside—her somewhat ravaged features make for a truly poignant connection with her rival, the dynamic young Neuwirth. That implied mother-daughter relationship reaches a powerful crescendo when, having decided at the end to combine their talents as a vaudeville twosome, they finally join together to sing and dance the "Hot Honey Rag," tipping their derbies, stretching their endless legs and

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sashaying into Fosse heaven.

The sustaining element of this musical is surprise, whether in plot, staging, music or acting. We're told that "things aren't always what they appear to be," and indeed they're not, whether the venal lawyer Billy Finn (James Naughton, looking and crooning like a young Dean Martin) is mendaciously singing "I don't care about expensive things (all I care about is love)" or the sob-sister journalist (D. Sabella) is taking off her wig, following a series of coloratura arias and revealing that she is a man, or the hapless Amos (Joel Grey in a winningly understated performance) is walking on stage for his bow and being denied his exit music. But the biggest surprise of all is how *Chicago* has been able to make such a deep social incision into the flabby flesh of our court system, our newspapers and our sentimental moral anatomy (Roxie, lying and murdering her way to stardom, is called a "living exemplar of what a wonderful country this is") and still emerge as a successful musical. Could it be that we are finally prepared to accept the truth about some of our motives and values through the medium of mass entertainment? Whatever the case, I left the theater exhilarated, not only curiously moved by the high quality of the professionalism but also filled with unaccustomed feelings of hope—about the future of the American musical, about the future of the American theater, even a little bit about the future of the nation.

It is doubtful that T.S. Eliot ever intended *The Waste Land* for the stage, though one of his works from that period, the fragment "Sweeney Agonistes," was written in the form of a play. (He never finished it because he found its rhythms "too fast" for speaking.) Still, *The Waste Land*, in my opinion, is the finest dramatic monologue since Browning's "My Last Duchess," and even richer in character, action and atmosphere. So it was entirely appropriate for Deborah Warner to prepare the fragments Eliot shored against his ruin for theatrical presentation starring her great alter ego and collaborator, the actress Fiona Shaw.

Produced by Jedediah Wheeler and the site-specific theater company En Garde Arts, Inc., *The Waste Land* (originally staged in Brussels in 1995) was held up for viewing here until Warner could locate the perfect venue for its grimy urban message. She chose the peeling Liberty Theatre on 42nd Street, a rundown, ramshackle building formerly used for porno movies. Inside, the patched, peeling theater with its broken seats seemed exactly right for Eliot's vision of the decline of Western civilization. How could Deborah Warner have

anticipated that, while she was turning *The Waste Land* into theater, the 42nd Street wasteland was itself being turned into Disneyland?

Appearing before us as a theatrical wraith, gaunt and tall, her hair close-cropped, her eyes blazing, Shaw enacts the various sections of the poem in a variety of characters and accents, making it a work of high tragedy and low comedy. The theater is dark, lit only by a series of bare-bulb ghost lights placed around the stage, and Shaw's shadow looms large against the cyclorama, forcing us to strain our eyes in order to follow the transitions of her interpretation. At least

three moments will long linger in my memory: Shaw's disgust and loathing over the sexual encounter in "The Fire Sermon;" her raucous rendering of the pub scene in "A Game of Chess" and the way she pronounced "'Jug Jug' to dirty ears" as if it were an obscenity; and her totally exhausted "Shantih shantih shantih" at the conclusion of "What the Thunder Said." The Warner-Shaw *Waste Land* was a generous helping of poetic reality, which made the busy mercantilism of the unreal city all the more scarifyingly prosaic when, blinking and spent, we wended our way into the brightly lit street. •

Jed Perl on Art

Painting Is a Woman

In Corot's masterpieces, which are seldom more than two feet high, all the fast-moving transformations of nineteenth-century Europe register seismographically, through the slightest shifts in color, shape and scale. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, who died in 1875, a year short of his eightieth birthday, was absolutely a man of his time, but he regarded everything from his own unique, at-an-angle perspective. He poured a tidal flow of artistic intelligence into a relatively restricted range of themes—over and over again, he painted a village road or a woman reading a book—and he relied on the concentrated emotional weight that he brought to every stroke of paint to mix poetry and pragmatism in startling new ways. I think that he is right up there with the giants, an artist of Velázquez's caliber. He goes into the dusty prop room of nineteenth-century art, with its picturesque ruins and peasant costumes and mandolins, and he regards the humdrum items with such rapt attentiveness that they become magical tokens of a time and place that's becoming mythic as it disappears. Corot doesn't make a big deal about turning the mundane into the absolute, but once you see what he's up to you can glimpse, beneath the delicately worked surfaces, reserves of sneaky exhilaration.

I don't know that there's anything in all of art that makes me happier than what Corot does in these canvases. The density of his effects is heaven for anybody who really cares about painting. To pack so much into such a small compass suggests a controlled extravagance that

has no equal. In the Roman views that Corot painted while he was in his 30s, all of paganism and Christianity passes before our eyes as the artist fine-tunes the color of a shadow on a crumbling wall. Corot's silvery views of trees and rivers around Paris define some catalytic out-of-time-and-space experience in which the twilight of romanticism melts straight into the dawn of abstract art. And in the series of half-a-dozen views of a woman in the artist's studio that he painted in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Corot joins the Velázquez of *Las Meninas* and the Watteau of *Gersaint's Shop* as one of the immortal chroniclers of the artist's relationship to the audience. In Corot's studio paintings, the audience has dwindled to a single visitor who sometimes scarcely seems to be looking at the canvas on the easel, and the result is a definitive description of the gathering solitude of the modern artist.

Corot's gift for pulling epochal shifts out of the tiniest formal decisions is what endears him to painters. They feel that on some transcendent level he's making the same kinds of judgments that they know from their everyday work in the studio. At the press preview for the Corot retrospective that is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art until January 19, I saw more painters than I can recall at a comparable event. I can't think of a show to which artists have responded so immediately and so unequivocally. Weeks into the run, there are people taking in the paintings one by one, and you can tell from the way that they're moving close, studying the surfaces inch by inch, that

many of them are artists. In the perfection of his tones, the originality of his forms and the rhythmic lucidity of his compositions, Corot rivals even Titian, and artists may love him more, because Corot doesn't insist on the grand scale and elaborate themes that sometimes threaten to depersonalize a genius's work.

There's an easygoing yet strong-willed feeling that runs through Corot's achievement. He was a prolific artist who experimented endlessly with the kind of big painting that ultimately earned him a hard-won popularity with the public of his day. Yet those efforts, however much they strained his gift for hairsbreadth-precise effects, never really deterred his independent spirit. I imagine that Corot's ability to remain himself while not totally rejecting the taste of his age fascinated Monet and Degas and other avant-garde artists who were establishing themselves during the last years of his life. Decades after his death, it was Corot's uncanny independence that made him a touchstone for Picasso and Braque and Gris, and for Matisse, who in 1912 ranked Corot among his five favorite painters, along with Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya and Manet. I would guess that anybody who truly loves Corot loves him for the huge freight of meaning that he packs into each brush stroke. But that Corot is not the artist whom the organizers of the large retrospective at the Metropolitan have placed beneath the spotlight.

The Corot show is just about the worst-structured retrospective that I've ever seen at the Metropolitan. An artist of Corot's caliber can't really be ruined, but this show comes dangerously close to turning him into a broken-down nineteenth-century period piece. The exhibit, which has already been seen in Paris and Ottawa, was organized by Michael Pantazzi of the National Gallery of Canada, Vincent Pomarède of the Louvre, and Gary Tinterow, the Engelhard Curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan. These men are obviously competent scholars with an admirable knowledge of the documentary sources, but I don't think that they really grasp the restless intelligence that races through this achievement. Like so many students of nineteenth-century art, they tend to evaluate an artist in terms of career moves, not in terms of the play of his imagination. Some of the documentary material in the catalog is very interesting, but it's pushed so far into the foreground that it sometimes seems as if the paintings are little more than illustrations of the journalistic accounts that were piling up, higher and higher, as the

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nineteenth century progressed.

In the last decades of his life, Corot became one of those Great Men whom the French public was glad to venerate, even if the man in the street had only an approximate idea of why this particular gent with a beret was a legend. It's this adorable-genius view of Corot, I think, that the curators of the retrospective want to revive. Pantazzi, Pomarède and Tinterow have exhumed the woozy-warm atmosphere that swirled around the aged artist who found favor with both the academy and the avant-garde. By giving pride of place to the large, loosely brushed imaginary landscapes that earned Corot a reputation as a forward-

looking painter whom even conservatives could enjoy, the curators have explained why Corot gained in popularity and could be referred to by one critic as "the patriarch of landscape painters." But I suspect that Tinterow and his colleagues also find a certain perverse postmodern satisfaction in playing the populist card. By resurrecting the nineteenth-century blockbuster popularity of "Le Père Corot," Tinterow and Company have uncovered an artist who fits with the blockbuster mood of our museums.

The show has a waxworks atmosphere, what with the deep red walls, tufted circular ottomans and the paint-

ings symmetrically hung. All of this may be intended to honor nineteenth-century taste, but mixed with the scholarly earnestness is a strong dose of camp cynicism. The combination is unfortunately familiar. For at least the past thirty years, curators and art historians have been dismantling the old view of nineteenth-century art as a fast-breaking avant-gardist narrative in favor of a static image of the century as Europe's ultimate Temple of Bad Taste. At first, some of the revisionist dabbling in kitsch was a breath of fresh air, a welcome dissent from an increasingly fossilized less-is-more vision of modern art. By the mid-'70s, however, the retro-chic thinking had degenerated into an automatic up-grading of anything that the moderns didn't like. And then the French, who had often been the last to catch on to their own avant-garde, gave the gold seal of approval to the new disposition with the opening of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 1986.

The Orsay has turned into a huge tourist attraction, but I think it's fair to say that people who love painting get the willies in this place where Ingres and Courbet are left to jostle for space with Jules Breton, Jean-Charles Cazin and Jules Bastien-Lepage. The Orsay celebrates a reverse snobbery that makes it fashionable to denigrate formal values, and it's this attitude that Tinterow and his colleagues have brought to bear on Corot. What we're seeing at the Met is the Orsayization of Corot. He's being celebrated as a product, maybe even a victim, of nineteenth-century taste.

Tinterow will insist, of course, that he really admires those big paintings of Corot's. I'm sure that he does. In the catalog some of them are called masterpieces, and the value judgments are backed up with lots of nineteenth-century opinion. Quality, as we all know, is a matter of opinion, and opinions are at least in part a function of one's experience. There is no mystery as to why a curator who works in the bread-and-circuses atmosphere of the big contemporary museums might feel a certain identification with the bread-and-circuses taste of an event such as the Universal Exposition of 1855, where Corot is said to have had his greatest popular success. The truth is that the small-is-beautiful side of Corot—which once earned him icon status among an elitist avant-garde—won't make much sense in a museum world where the corporate sponsor is king. And for those who went to the Metropolitan to see the Corot revered by Picasso, Braque and Matisse, this show comes close to being an out and out lie.

Corot was a late starter. His parents, who owned a celebrated millinery shop on the rue du Bac, wanted him to go into the draper's trade, but by the early 1820s, when he was already in his 20s, he had set his sights on painting. Like many turning-point figures in nineteenth-century art, he could operate at a distance from established taste because he had an income from his family; he worked without giving much thought to sales, which only began to add up when he was well into middle age. This man, who never married and lived with his parents until his mother died in 1851, was in many respects not an especially vivid figure, but he always seems to have known his own mind.

Right away, he fastened on landscape as his essential subject. He studied briefly with Achille-Etna Michallon, a significant neoclassical painter who died young; he then worked for three years with Michallon's teacher, Jean-Victor Bertin. By the time Corot arrived in Italy in 1825—he

ultimately made three trips—he had a startlingly idiomatic way of translating complicated vistas onto two-dimensional surfaces. And some of the feeling for clearly juxtaposed colors and forms that animates the oil sketches passed into Corot's early essays in Salon-size painting. *Hagar in the Wilderness* (1835), which is in the Metropolitan's collection, has a clean-lined, off-balance beauty that is far from neoclassical conventions. There's something winningly uncompromising about the way that Corot goes right ahead and paints an angel hovering above this very specific landscape; this may not be a completely satisfying picture, but it's certainly the product of an original mind.

In the smaller paintings that Corot began to paint practically before he unpacked his bags in Rome, his originality is unfettered, and he brings a new kind of naturalistic inventiveness into art. Looking at the Coliseum and the Forum and the Tiber with the Castel

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Sant' Angelo, he sees more in the familiar scenes than anybody had ever seen before. As he surveys the Forum, he turns the cluttered ruins into a multi-dimensional checkerboard, a quirky topography of volumes and voids. Standing in front of the Villa Medici, he rhymes the nearby trees and fountain with the distant dome of Saint Peter's to create a visual spectacle that perfectly mirrors the city's historical overlays. Wherever Corot sets up his easel in the Eternal City and the surrounding countryside, he turns the Graeco-Roman tradition, with its strongly modeled forms, into paintings that have their own wonderful, something-old-something-new play of light and shade.

What's astonishing about these paintings is the immediate, peremptory impact that Corot achieves even as he celebrates nuance, paradox and contradiction. He seems to be conveying some of the omnivorous excitement of a young man who's falling head over heels in love

with the south. You can see how really unique his achievement here is if you go to "In the Light of Italy," an exhibition that focuses on the open-air painting done in Italy in the late 1700s and early 1800s by artists from all over Europe; it opened at the National Gallery in Washington last spring and is at the Brooklyn Museum until January 12. Organized by Philip Conisbees, Sarah Faunce, Jeremy Strick and Peter Galassi, it's an immaculately lucid, medium-sized scholarly show. You feel the earnest and intrepid high spirits of the artists from all over Europe who congregated in Rome. There is much outstanding work. The Welshman Thomas Jones and the Dane Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg can work marvels when it comes to picking some precious vignette out of the Roman spectacle, yet neither they nor any of the other artists in the show can match Corot's plangency of color, or his rhythmic assurance, or his genius for transforming visual happenstance into formal arabesque.

Obviously the work that Corot did back in France looks different from the Italian achievement, if for no other reason than that there are so many differences in topography, light and vegetation. Still, there's more of a steady development through the whole of his landscape painting than is sometimes acknowledged. It's obvious that a work such as the brown-on-brown study of rooftops done in Orléans around 1830, after the first Italian trip, evinces the same eye for surprising juxtapositions that we know in the Roman work. But so does a late masterpiece which is not included in this show, the Louvre's *The Bridge at Mantes* (1868-70), in which the juxtaposition of trees and bridge creates an end-to-end interwoven space that's as poignantly specific as any of the views of the Roman Forum.

In his bigger works, Corot struggled to become a generalizer, and sometimes he succeeded; but he always loved specificity, and the mind that brings a few tiny figures into a Roman view in order to suggest a social dimension is still hard at work in 1871, when Corot paints the town of Douai. In *The Belfry, Douai*, the corners of two looming buildings frame the foreground, a street full of figures and the elaborate belfry recede into the distance, and we have a view of the ordinary life of a French town that's quite as definitive as Vermeer's *Street in Delft*. Corot is absolutely Vermeer's equal when it comes to focusing so intently on everyday occurrences that time freezes and we slip through a trap door into eternity. The old man who painted Douai had lost none of the avidity for detail that fills to bursting the terra-cotta-and-blue visions of Italy that he did decades before. He is no longer inclined to hit the accents quite so hard; it is a more experienced kind of clear-headedness that you feel in his infinitely gradated grays.

Corot set out to be a neoclassical landscape painter, but almost immediately he gave the realist oil sketch an unheard-of geometrical intricacy, and by the end of his life his close study of the rainswept northern atmosphere had ushered in a new kind of romantic visual poetry. Much of the excitement of Corot's work is in the way that all stylistic categories dissolve. This was fairly typical of the great artists of the nineteenth century. It was a dazzlingly exciting age for painting, for even as the collapse of art as a public avowal left many artists frozen in place, the great minds turned catastrophe to their advantage and rushed forward unencumbered.

Corot was much more of an experimentalist than you would guess from this show. Tinterow's installation includes no

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drawings or prints, and although the reason for this is no doubt in part a practical one having to do with lighting levels, it's a pity to deny museumgoers the unconventionality of Corot's drawing. Especially in his figure studies, he explores contours and volumes with a lack of preconception that declares his complete freedom from academic standards. There's something almost naïve about the way that Corot will underline an edge, or turn the shaded side of an arm into an autonomous dark shape. But when you think of these exploratory sketches in relation to the beautifully resolved volumes and intervals in his figure paintings, you see that they are great working drawings, the kind of thing that painterly painters from Titian to Bonnard have done prior to turning to the canvas.

The landscape drawings have their own fascination, and there's also a lot to be said about Corot as a printmaker. He was a great etcher. And he is the only artist who made something truly original of the *cliché-verre*, a method of scratching into a blackened glass plate to create a negative that's then printed on photographic paper. These *clichés-verres* have some of the look of an etching, but with a softer, silvery sheen. Corot gives the new technology a moodiness that brings some of the chiaroscuro effects of early photography under the draftsman's control. A couple of *clichés-verres* are included in a concurrent exhibition at the Metropolitan, devoted to the photographer Eugène Cuvelier, who was a friend of Corot's and helped him with his *clichés-verres*. But even though these few prints are up elsewhere in the museum, it's no substitute for their being included in the retrospective proper.

Curators need some wit, some feeling for the labyrinthine twists of a great imagination, to deal with an artist as subtly forceful, and sometimes as carelessly prolific, as Corot. Corot paid his respects to the idea of the old-fashioned masterpiece, but the irony of the situation was that the very concept was so corrupted by his time that only an artist who knew how to handle slightly garish fortissimo effects could make a really big painting work. *The Evening Star* (1864), with its

dramatic just-before-darkness sky and silhouetted figure, is the kind of lyric icon that a contemporary of Corot's such as Millet might have been able to imbue with the requisite syrupy drama. If Millet—a great artist, though not in Corot's league—had painted *The Evening Star*, he would have shown us why this woman is reaching toward the stars in a gesture halfway between hope and resignation. There would be a dramatic engine that focused the work. Corot is too refined—



THE GREEK GIRL, C. 1870-73

and too modern—to want to tell that story. He depends on his finely calibrated values to hold together the five-foot-wide painting. I understand what he's trying to do, but the result is a one-note composition that's as static and kitschy as Maxfield Parrish.

By the 1860s, Corot liked to conceive of a large painting in terms of an end-to-end shimmering opalescence. He may have seen these tone poems, which reject the knock-'em-dead effects of mainstream mid-century taste, as anti-Salon Salon paintings, but their quietness is

generally scaled too big. Corot loses track of the inch-by-inch movements that ought to carry us through the painting; he ends up inventing his own kind of nineteenth-century cliché. Only rarely does he manage to make this idea of an almost evenly inflected immensity work for him, but it certainly clicks in *Souvenir of Mortefontaine* (1864), in which the small figure of a woman reaching her arms up the trunk of a tree becomes a miraculous image of longing and hope.

It is absolutely typical of Corot that this canvas is just over two feet high. In a sense, he's using an idea that goes all the way back to the Roman paintings, where grand scale is evoked through a relatively miniaturized format. And it is absolutely typical of Gary Tinterow's horrible installation that visitors may miss *Souvenir of Mortefontaine*, in which Corot prefigures in paint a kind of Debussyan orchestration, because it's nearly crushed by the juggernaut to its right, the ghastly *Impression of Morning* (1855), in which Corot's music turns to Muzak.

By the time you've arrived at the last room of the retrospective, where Tinterow has gathered together many of the great figure paintings that poured forth from Corot's easel in the 1860s and 1870s, the show has been overtaken by such a coarse-grained, gaudy Second Empire tone that museumgoers may be hard put to grasp Corot's ineffable emotions. Corot paints a few men—one in armor, another playing a cello—and they're superb, but it's the women who really hold the viewer. They are as innumerable and beautiful as the maidens on the Parthenon frieze.

Sometimes the model is a sophisticated modern woman, dressed for an afternoon at home. More often she wears a costume that suggests a French or Italian peasant or a gypsy. In some paintings a dark beauty is draped in fabrics from a North African bazaar; in others she wears nothing at all and, reclining in a scrap of landscape, seems to consider the possibility of impersonating a goddess. Corot paints women playing mandolins and women reading and women who have closed their books. He suggests a muse, a sybil, an allegory of contempla-

tion. And there's a winningly informal feeling about all the make-believe, as if neither Corot nor his models take the role-playing especially seriously. The costumes are worn so casually that you feel that they could just as easily be set aside. These women have more important things on their minds. But what? That's the question that holds you.

Corot had painted some beautiful figure studies in Italy in the 1820s, and some accomplished, though at times slightly stiff, portraits back in France. Yet the obsession with the figure that seems to grow and grow in the last decades of his life doesn't exactly come out of the earlier work. What we're seeing here is one of those profound shifts in appetite or attitude that sometimes overtake people in the middle of their lives. It's almost as if Corot suddenly found himself applying to the painting of the figure all the lyric-realist techniques that he acquired during his long years as a landscape painter. And in these hundreds of studies of one or another beautiful young woman, he really invents a new kind of landscape. It is a topography of human feeling. In painting, a most concrete medium, mysteries must be spelled out, and the glory of Corot's figures is that they give the human enigma an up-front, unequivocal shape.

The selection of figures in the retrospective is large but by no means definitive, and they're hung with little awareness of the way that the internal scale of one painting can clash with that of the next. The installation doesn't flow. Still, there are so many peerless examples included that you can't help but get a feeling for the infinite variety of Corot's effects. Matisse once observed that Corot was one of those artists who "on each occasion paint the portrait of a hand, a new hand each time." And so he was. He tries all kinds of things, and he almost always succeeds. Certain figures, such as *The Greek Girl* (1870-73), are fully modeled volumes, with a feeling for sculptural form that rivals Leonardo (whose *Mona Lisa* Corot had directly challenged a decade earlier in his *Woman with the Pearl*). Other canvases, such as *A Woman Reading* (1869-70) from the Metropolitan, are almost anti-sculptural; here Corot turns the arms and torso into a series of idiosyncratic arclike shapes that support the quietly shadowy face. It's in tightly packed compositions such as *A Woman Reading*—as well as in the cityscapes—that Corot prefigures Cubism. Picasso, Braque and Gris looked at Corot's canvases and saw in their gray and tan and brown structures the prologue to everything that they had done.

It's the astonishing solidity of the

paintings that makes the metaphors click. The particularity allows the poetry to fly. "Who *are* they?" the poet James Merrill asked about Corot's women in 1960, and we all know the happy bewilderment that he's describing. Merrill would admire Corot: the painter was a northerner who loved the south and knew how to caress but never puncture the balloon of a big idea. Merrill wonders if Corot's women are "the last of the Lamias? The first patients of Freud?" And they do exist in some never-never land bordered by Keats and Freud. Corot touches on the unfathomable feelings of the bereft. Not included in this retrospective are several marvelously unexpected canvases from 1872, in which Corot brings together two or three of these lost souls in a twilit forest: a mother and daughter, a child on a pony and another woman with a walking stick. In these paintings Corot foreshadows the mysterious presences of Cézanne's *Bathers* and Picasso's *Saltimbanques*, in front of which Rilke wrote the great lines in *The Duino Elegies* which could also apply to Corot's women (and no doubt inspired Merrill's question): "But tell me, who *are* they, these wanderers, even more transient than we ourselves?"

Looking at Corot's later figures, you sense how deep and secret an affinity he

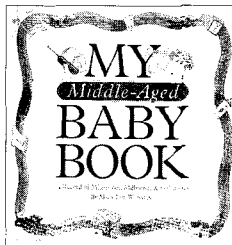
had with these women. He comes closest to defining the nature of that relationship in the six paintings of a model seated before an easel in the studio, and luckily they're all in this retrospective. The key to these paintings is that Corot allows the model to take his place. She may be a visitor, but she's no interloper, and as she sits in the chair that he might have occupied only a moment ago, the distance between artist and model narrows. The studio, which is his home, becomes hers, and they become one.

I wouldn't want to choose among these paintings—each has its particular magnificence—but there are two of which I never tire. One is the version in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., with its infinitely subtle browns. Here the seated woman is enveloped by the geometric complexity of the atelier, with its stove and wall full of pictures and elegant dog. This is Corot's hymn to the joys of everydayness, to the things that he must have looked forward to seeing each morning when he began to work. In an entirely different vein is the canvas in the Musée d'Orsay. Now it's late in the day, and Corot uses a Caravaggesque play of light to pick out the woman's head, her right arm, a bit of her shoulder and the upholstered back of a chair. Holding a mandolin, looking not so

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much at the painting on the easel as off into space, the model is transfixed by that melancholy hour when the light has finally failed. The model in this deep-toned canvas is a dreamer who's vanishing into her dream.

In his studio paintings Corot gave an account of his life-in-art that is in almost all respects the exact opposite of the story that Courbet told in his immense *The Painter's Studio*, done a decade earlier. In order to create an allegory of his modern life, Courbet believed, he had to resurrect the mural-scale masterpiece, and he nearly succeeded, in a work that includes elegant collectors, a rag picker and a portrait of Baudelaire and adds up to the strangest studio party of all time. Of course Courbet's picture is a wonder, but when I think of it in relation to the heart-stopping simplicity of Corot's studio paintings, I can't help but feel that what that notorious revolutionary Courbet has wrought is old-fashionedness incarnate. Courbet insists on placing himself centerstage, with the model

as a strong—though sensitive—woman standing by her man. Corot pares the allegory down to an incident and then vanishes.

In the last decade of his life this man who never married was saying that painting is a woman, a woman who is as beautiful and complicated and undefinable as art itself. Gary Tinterow concludes the retrospective on a downbeat note, with three turgid landscapes that span the career, but by then museumgoers have had so many epiphanies that they'll hardly care. The heroines that Corot painted in his last years have risen out of their century to join the women of Piero, Leonardo and Watteau in a realm where understatement is the language of the gods. Of course each woman has her appointed role—Queen, Madonna, Lover, Muse—but these immortal heroines understand that a role is nothing but a pretense. They know what Corot knows, which is that it is only by refusing to reveal anything that they will be able to tell all. •

fun to be with in a gathering and was good at reciting poetry for his companions. He grew rather fond of *ma'jun* [a narcotic] and under its influence would lose his head. He was of a scrappy temperament and had many scars and brands to show for it." Though scarcely a model parent, Babur's father, Umar-Shaykh Mirza, was the very soul of docility compared to the rest of his family. More or less the first thought that occurs to Babur on hearing of his father's death is to flee to the mountains so that "at least I would not fall captive and ... go to one of my uncles." Of one of his uncles, Babur writes: "He never missed the five daily prayers, even when he was drinking.... He was a good drinker. Once he started drinking, he drank continually for twenty or thirty days, but when he stopped he did not drink again for the same amount of time." And of another uncle: "He was addicted to vice and debauchery. He drank wine continually. He kept a lot of catamites, and in his realm wherever there was a comely, beardless youth, he did everything he could to turn him into a catamite."

Empire and Soul

BY AMITAV GHOSH

The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor translated, edited and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston

(Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Oxford University Press
472 pp., \$39.95)

The *Baburnama* is the autobiography of India's first Mughal emperor, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur (1483-1530), and it is one of the true marvels of the medieval world. It belongs with that tiny handful of the world's literary masterpieces that can accurately be described as unique: works that are without precedent and without imitators. In the Western tradition, the military memoir has a pedigree that goes back to Xenophon and Julius Caesar. But Babur had no such antecedents available to him. As Wheeler M. Thackston, his most recent translator, notes: "Babur's memoirs are the first—and until relatively recent times, the only—true autobiography in Islamic literature." In setting out to write an autobiography, Babur did something that very few writers have done. He invented a form out of whole cloth.

Babur's true literary peers, in this sense, are such epochal figures as Lady Murasaki and Cervantes. But this writer was also the founder of a great empire: Babur was Pizarro and Cervantes. What made him pen this immense book? (It numbered 382 folio pages in the original.) And how on earth did he find the time? Between the moment that he gained his first kingdom, at the age of 12, and his death, thirty-five years later, there seems scarcely to have been a quiet day in Babur's life.

His first kingdom was the only one for which he did not have to risk his life: he inherited it from his father, a scion of a dynasty that was far richer in aspiring rulers than in actual thrones. Babur took a matter-of-fact view of his father: "He was short in stature, had a round beard and a fleshy face, and was fat.... He used to drink a lot. Later in life he held drinking parties once or twice a week. He was

Predictably, Babur's uncles and cousins descended upon his territories soon after he had acceded to the throne. Not to be outdone, Babur counter-attacked. At the age of 13 he led an army to Samarkand, to join a clutch of cousins and second cousins who were taking advantage of another relative's absence to lay siege to the fabled city. After a siege of seven months, Babur succeeded in having himself crowned the ruler of Samarkand. He was to rule the city for no more than a hundred days, but in many ways this was the defining moment of Babur's life. He was to besiege, conquer and lose Samarkand many times over before he was finally driven southward. But up to the end of his life, even when he had conquered a realm far vaster, richer and more promising than those that had been taken from him, he still pined for his lost city.

For Babur, Samarkand was the epitome of civilization, the center of the world's urbanity and the fountainhead of all culture. He won a sizable chunk of India, the land whose riches had triggered Europe's Age of Exploration, but all he really wanted was Samarkand. His link with Samarkand was, in the first instance, familial. His ancestor Timur Lang (1336-1404), known to the West as Tamerlane, had made Samarkand the capital of a vast empire and built it into a great center of art and literature. For Babur, as for his innumerable Timurid uncles and cousins, to rule Samarkand was to claim succession to their glorious ancestor, the guarantor of their own titles to rule.

The idea of conquering empires was a part of Babur's family heritage. He traced his descent not just to Timur Lang, but also to Jenghis Khan. The story of Babur's kingdom-seeking adolescence and youth has its genesis ultimately in that epochal churning of peoples and cultures that was set in motion by Jenghis Khan (1167-1227) in the thirteenth century. Jenghis Khan's descendants evidently inherited his remarkable cultural and social adaptability. In the course of his life, the old man had become increasingly Sinicised, and had developed an interest in Buddhism and Confucianism. He seems to have had little empathy for the traditions of western Asia; certainly the Muslims and Christians of those regions never encountered a more determined enemy. Within a generation or two, however, Jenghis Khan's descendants took on the cultural and religious (if not linguistic) colorings of the regions that they ruled. One of his grandsons, Kubilai Khan, became emperor of China and a cornerstone of the Confucian order, while another grandson became the Sultan of Persia and a Muslim.

Babur traced his lineage to Jenghis Khan's second son, Chagatay. When the worlds that Jenghis Khan conquered came to be divided among his progeny, Chagatay inherited Central Asia, a region in which Islam was the principal religion, and Persian the language of cultural prestige. Chagatay's inheritance soon fragmented into a number of warring principalities, but he bequeathed his name not just to a realm, but also to a lineage and a language: eastern Turkish, the tongue whose greatest literary exponent Babur was to become.

Central Asia was briefly reunited by Amir Timur, an extra-dynastic usurper who nonetheless thought it politic to lay claim to the legacy of the Great Khan by marrying a Jenghisid princess. His descendants, however, fought each other with the usual courtly relish of medieval princelings. By the time of Babur's birth, the valleys and the steppes of central Asia teemed with Timurid princes in search of realms to rule. Such was the magic of the

Timurid-Jenghisid pedigree that nobody who owned it ever seems to have forfeited the right to a throne.

From the age of 12 onward, Babur (like his innumerable cousins and uncles) took it for granted that he was born to rule. Ruling was in a sense a job, a calling, the only thing he knew how to do, the only thing he could conceive of doing. Even at times when he possessed little more than his horse and the clothes on his back, he and the members of his tiny entourage took it for granted that a

pushing them further and further to the south and the west, so now Babur and his cousins found themselves facing a people who had decided to create their own moment of destiny. With the methodical precision of a cherry-picker, Shaybani Khan plucked Babur and his fellow Timurids off, one by one, driving them steadily before him. "For nearly 140 years the capital Samarkand had been in our family," writes Babur. "Then came the Uzbeks, the foreign foe from God knows where, and took over."

Babur was too close to the events to notice, but there were some marvelous symmetries to these centuries-long processes of migration in Central Asia, to these patterns of encroachment and displacement, of the sudden ascendancy of a nation or a dynasty, of the rise and decline of glittering cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand, Ghazni and Herat. Some of these symmetries even seeped into Babur's life. In much the same way as Shaybani Khan, the Uzbek, was harrying Babur, Jenghis Khan had once pursued a young warrior-poet, one whose life was perhaps even more colorful than Babur's.

The name of the Great Khan's prey was Jalal al-din. He was the heir-presumptive of the kingdom of Khwarazm, centered in the region between the Caspian and Aral seas. Jenghis Khan had a special grudge against the king of Khwarazm, and after seizing the kingdom he sent a detachment of his swiftest riders to hunt down its ruling family.

In what must count as one of the most amazing escapes in history, the 14-year-old Jalal al-din rode without a break for forty days, circling through the deserts, steppes and mountains of Iran and Afghanistan, managing somehow to stay ahead of the great Mongol general Jēbe, known even among his fast-riding peoples as "The Arrow." Jenghis Khan finally hunted Jalal al-din to a place from which no escape seemed possible, a gorge above the upper Indus. But there again Jalal al-din succeeded in evading the Khan: he spurred his horse over the cliff and into the river, more than a hundred feet



BABUR AND HUMAYUN WITH COURTIER'S, C. 1650

kingdom would somehow transpire, if not in this district then in the next. Babur was reluctantly pushed into southeastern Afghanistan and eventually into northern India. These were not his realms of choice; but they were better than the prospect of being an unemployed king.

The instrument of Babur's misery in his early kingdom-seeking years was a chief called Shaybani ("Wormwood") Khan (1451-1510), an Uzbek and a hereditary enemy. The wheel that Jenghis Khan had set in motion had now come full circle: just as his armies had displaced other Turco-Mongol groups,

Courtesy Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

below. Legend has it that the pursuer called off the chase, summoned his entourage and pointed to the young prince swimming in the torrent below. "There," said Jenghis Khan, who knew about these things, "goes a brave man."

He would have said no less for his own descendant. Babur was nothing if not brave. On one occasion in *The Baburnama*, he takes on a hundred men more or less single-handedly. "Sultan-Ahmad Tambal was standing, maintaining his position with around a hundred men ... shouting, 'Strike! Strike!' ... At that point three men were left with me. ... I shot an arrow I had in my thumb ring. ... When I had another arrow on the string, I went forward. The other three remained behind." There are times, though, when he glimpses the end of the road. Led into a trap by an old retainer, he writes: "Suddenly I felt odd. There is nothing worse in the world than fear for one's life. ... I felt I could endure no more. I rose and went to a corner of the orchard. I thought to myself that whether one lived to a hundred or a thousand in the end one had to die. ... I readied myself for death." Minutes later, help arrives.

Often Babur is in despair. His nineteenth year proves to be a hard one: "During this period in Tashkent I endured much hardship and misery. I had no realm—and no hope of any realm—to rule. Most of my liege men had departed. The few who were left were too wretched to move about with me. ... Finally I had had all I could take of homelessness and alienation. 'With such difficulties,' I said to myself, 'it would be better to go off on my own so long as I am alive, and with such deprivation and wretchedness it would be better for me to go off to wherever my feet will carry me, even to the ends of the earth.'" But in the end, stoically, he resigns himself to the difficult business of finding a realm: "When one has pretensions to rule and a desire for conquest, one cannot sit back and just watch if events don't go right once or twice."

Eventually, our hero's perseverance pays off. In 1504, "at the beginning of my twenty-third year [when] I first put a razor to my face," moving ever southward, staying one step ahead of the Uzbeks, he stumbles upon the kingdom of Kabul and he decides to seize it for himself. His new realm is full of surprises: "Eleven or twelve dialects are spoken in Kabul Province: Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Mongolian, Hindi. ... It is not known if there are so many different peoples and languages in any other province." Slowly, inevitably, his attention is drawn to the vast subcontinent on the far side of the

mountains. He observes, speculatively, that "four roads lead [to Kabul] from Hindusthan." But his principal ambitions are still directed toward Samarkand. He even succeeds in briefly recapturing the city of his dreams, only to find himself expelled from it yet again shortly afterwards. With his northern options closed, he turns to the south.

Through all his adventures, Babur kept writing, mainly poetry. Even as he flees from the Uzbeks, he finds time to carve a verse on rock beside a spring. "Like us many have spoken over this spring / but they were gone in the twinkling of an eye, / We conquered the world with bravery and might, / but we did not take it with us to the grave." It is a commentary on our times that to us it seems odd, or at least unexpected, that a warrior and a statesman should devote his attention to intricate questions of scansion and metrics. But Babur came from a long line of literary rulers; some of the greatest works of Persian literature were composed in the court of his great-grandfather Amir Timur.

Still, the literary ambitions of Babur's ancestors usually stopped at connoisseurship, patronage and the occasional composition of a *divan*, the collection of poems that was expected of every man of good breeding. Babur did indeed compose several collections of poems, but he was the only man of his line to embark on a work of extended prose. In addition, he did it not in Persian, the literary language of his court, but in Chagatay Turkish, the domestic demotic of his family.

To read *The Baburnama* is to ask oneself again and again what could possibly have prompted a man in Babur's position to write his memoirs. Autobiography was not a form that flourished in Asia, certainly not in Central Asia, where Babur's roots lay. As for the Indian subcontinent, I know of only one autobiography written there before the nineteenth century: a brief account of the life of a merchant. The closest Babur comes to explaining his motives is this: "I have simply written the truth. I do not intend by what I have written to compliment myself: I have simply set down exactly what happened. Since I have made it a point in this history to write the truth of every matter and to set down no more than the reality of every event, as a consequence I have reported every good and evil I have seen of father and brother and set down the actuality of every fault and virtue of relative and stranger. May the reader excuse me: may the listener take me not to task."

But he may have come closer to the truth in his first poem, a *ghazal*, written

at the age of 18: "Other than my own soul I never found a faithful friend / Other than my own heart I never found a confidant." It may have been a sense of loneliness, or apartness, that compelled Babur to set down these reflections on his life; and it was probably the intimacy of that endeavor that led him to choose his domestic language over the courtly diction that was generally used in his circle. The memoir that he produced, as a result, was anything but the usual chronicle of affairs of state and battles lost and won. Written centuries before the discovery of the Self, *The Baburnama* is, astonishingly, a narrative of self-discovery.

The tone of the work is disarmingly trusting and confiding. In its self-revelation, it yields nothing to the confessional memoir of the 1990s. Babur does not neglect to record the sexual hesitations of his first marriage: "since it was my first marriage I was bashful, I went to her only once every ten, fifteen, or twenty days." And he writes lyrically about an adolescent infatuation with a boy: "before this experience I had never felt a desire for anyone, nor did I listen to talk of love and affection or speak of such things." His evaluations of his relatives and his contemporaries are so frank and unguarded as to suggest that he did not expect his memoirs to be widely circulated.

He writes no less trenchantly about women than men: as friends or adversaries, they were evidently a formidable force in his life. The women in his book are strong-willed and independent; they declare their own agency without hesitation, in matters political and personal. We see Babur at critical moments going into the women's quarters to ask advice: we read about the delinquency of a widowed aunt who gives away her son's kingdom to none other than the dreaded Uzbek, Shaybani Khan, in the hope of winning his love ("in her lust to get a husband, that wretched, feeble-minded woman brought destruction on her son"); and about another aunt who was so domineering that her husband dared not "go to any of his other wives." We hear of powerful princes being swiftly dispatched by ambitious concubines. We even learn of women who took the initiative in courting Babur. The contemporary Muslim fundamentalists who would carry Afghanistan back to an idealized past in which women never stepped out of the house would do well to have a look at this classic of Islamic life in their part of the world. They would find that the Middle Ages were not quite what they imagine them to be.

Babur is at his most self-revelatory in his description of his drinking life. He

came from a hard-drinking line, though he was 29 before he touched his first drink: "In my childhood I had no desire for wine, for I was unaware of the enjoyment of it. Occasionally my father had offered me some, but I had made excuses. After my father's death I was abstinent. . . . Later, with the desires of young manhood and the promptings of the carnal soul, when I had an inclination for wine, nobody offered—no one even knew that I was interested." Then, at a party in the city of Herat, in southwestern Afghanistan, his nobles offered him wine. "It crossed my mind," writes Babur, "that since they were making such proposals, and here we had come to a fabulous city like Herat, where all the implements of pleasure and revelry were present, and all the devices of entertainment and enjoyment were close at hand, if I didn't drink now, when would I? Deliberating thus with myself, I resolved to make the leap." This was the beginning of a twenty-year love affair with wine. Babur seems to have dedicated much of his time in Afghanistan to the pursuit of wine and *ma'jun*.

Again, so much for Afghan fundamentalism. Babur provides us with a meticulous record of the parties of his Kabul years. "At midday we rode off on an excursion, got on a boat, and drank spirits. . . . We drank on the boat until late that night, left the boat roaring drunk, and got on our horses. I took a torch in my hand and, reeling to one side and then the other, let the horse gallop free-reined along the riverbank all the way to the camp. I must have been really drunk. The next morning they told me that I had come galloping into camp holding a torch. I didn't remember a thing, except that when I got to my tent I vomited a lot." And so things went, until he led his fifth, and final, expedition into India. Shortly before a decisive battle, Babur made a spectacular gesture: he took a public oath of temperance.

The cellars in his camp were emptied into the sand, and he personally broke his sumptuous gold and silver wineglasses and goblets and distributed the pieces to the poor. Three weeks later, he led his army into battle against a massive force assembled by Rana Sangram Singh, then the most powerful Rajput ruler in North India. Babur prevailed. He did not find temperance easy, though he consoled himself liberally with *ma'jun*. "Everybody regrets drinking and then takes the oath," he wrote. "But I have taken the oath and now regret it." Yet he was true to his oath: he never drank again.

In the course of the two decades that he spent in Kabul, Babur led four ex-

peditions into India. His fifth and final campaign was launched in October, 1525. It had a characteristically light-hearted beginning: "We mostly drank and had morning draughts on drinking days." Between marches Babur and his nobles wrote poetry, collected obscene jokes and gave chase to the occasional rhinoceros.

Delhi was then in the control of the Lodi Sultans, a dynasty of Afghan Muslim rulers who had done a great deal to enrich the architectural heritage of the capital. (Their memory is enshrined today in New Delhi's Lodi Gardens, one of the world's loveliest urban parks.) Despite internal dissensions, the Lodis managed to field an army of 100,000 men and 1,000 elephants against Babur's paltry force of 12,000. The armies met on April 20, 1526, at the historic battlefield of Panipat, a few miles north of Delhi. Despite the odds, Babur routed the Lodi Sultan and took possession of Delhi.

With the defeat of Rana Sanga's Rajput coalition the next year, Babur secured his hold on northern India. There were skirmishes and minor battles to be fought, but for the most part Babur busied himself in distributing the spoils to his followers and retainers, and in making detailed observations of his new kingdom. With his usual curiosity, he

made extensive inquiries about the natural history of northern India, and on the beliefs and the customs of its inhabitants. It is clear from Babur's notes that he found much that did not please him: the place was too hot, its fruit was unfamiliar, its peoples were bafflingly unlike any he had ever known. But then Babur was never very easy to please, especially where people were concerned; his was a tribal world, and his loyalties and pride were largely invested in his kinsmen and his lineage. For most of those who fell outside that circle—Afghans, Shias, Uzbeks, Indians and so on—he reserved a curiously unprejudiced dislike.

A strain of deep melancholy runs through the last pages of the *The Baburnama*, as though he had come to realize that ruling his new kingdom would entail permanent exile from the landscapes of his childhood. "Our concern for going thence [to Kabul] is limitless and overwhelming," he wrote to a friend the year before his death. "How can one forget the pleasures of that country? Especially when abstaining from drinking, how can one forget a licit pleasure like melons and grapes? Recently a melon was brought and as I cut it and ate it I was oddly affected. I wept the whole time I was eating it." His Indian victories seem to have left Babur with the feeling that

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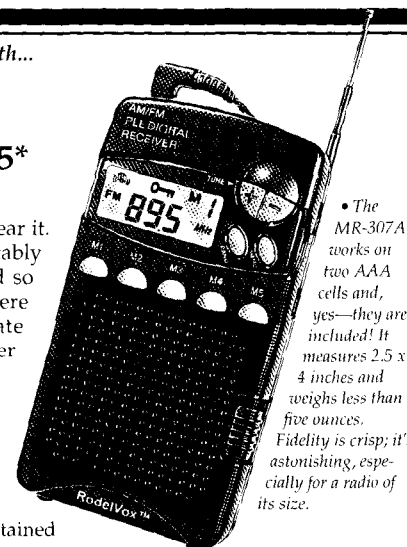
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his life's work was over. Homesickness, nostalgia and abstinence evidently combined to rob him of his will to live.

Of the many stories told about Babur, none is more wonderful than that of his death. In 1530, Humayun, Babur's beloved eldest son and heir-apparent, was stricken by a fever. He was brought immediately to Babur's court at Agra; but despite the best efforts of the royal physicians, his condition steadily worsened. Driven to despair, Babur consulted a man of religion, who told him that the remedy "was to give in alms the most valuable thing one had and to seek cure from God." Babur is said to have replied: "I am the most valuable thing that Humayun possesses; than me he has no better thing; I shall make myself a sacrifice for him. May God the Creator accept it."

Greatly distressed, Babur's courtiers and friends tried to explain that the sage had meant that he should give away money, or gold, or a piece of property. Humayun possessed a priceless diamond, they said, which could be sold and the proceeds given to the poor. Babur would not hear of it. "What value has worldly wealth," he is quoted as having said. "And how can it be a redemption for Humayun? I myself shall be his sacrifice." He walked three times around Humayun's bed, praying: "O God! If a life may be exchanged for a life, I who am Babur, I give my life and my being for a Humayun." A few minutes later, he cried: "We have borne it away, we have borne it away." And sure enough, from that moment Babur began to sicken, while Humayun grew slowly well. Babur died near Agra on December 21, 1530. He left orders for his body to be buried in Kabul.

As a writer, an intellectual and a soldier, Babur stood very far above the men of his time. As a ruler, on the other hand, his ideas never extended much beyond those he had absorbed from his cousins and his uncles in his kingdom-seeking days in the steppes. The model of governance that he brought to his Indian empire was essentially the one that he imbibed in his early youth on the steppe, where the business of ruling entailed little more than knocking a rival off his perch and taking his place. Babur had little interest in creating instruments of government.

As a result, he left behind a throne that stood on very weak supports. Within ten years of his death, his son Humayun was driven out of India by Sher Shah Suri, a soldier of extraordinary talent and vision. Born in the eastern province of Bihar, into a relatively humble Muslim family, Sher Shah created a bureaucratic and administrative machine of remark-

able complexity. He was to rule in Delhi for only five years, but on his death in 1545 he left behind a sound administrative infrastructure. In 1555, Humayun invaded northern India with the help of the Shah of Persia, and conquered Delhi once again from Sher Shah's unworthy heirs. It was probably fortunate for the Mughal dynasty that Humayun did not linger long on his throne. He died within a few months of entering Delhi, stumbling down a steep staircase, while under the influence. It fell to Babur's grandson Akbar, then a boy of 13, to take the throne.

Akbar (1542-1605) proved to be one of the greatest rulers in the history of the Indian subcontinent. He appears to have had a profound understanding of Indian institutions of kingship, and particularly of the concept of the "universal ruler." He proved adept at incorporating the many different religious, linguistic and dynastic traditions of his empire into the culture of his court. He even synthesized various Muslim and Hindu traditions into a religion of his own devising, the *Din-i-Ilahi*, a creed that was, not unpredictably, centered on himself. Although the new religion never quite caught on, Akbar still enjoyed an exceptionally long reign. The aura of legitimacy that he left behind was to sustain Mughal rule for more than a century.

History is notoriously not about the past. In recent years, extremist Hindus in India have succeeded in creating a firestorm of political controversy by exhuming aspects of Mughal history. In 1992, in a matter of hours, a well-organized Hindu mob tore down a sixteenth-century mosque in the city of Ayodhya, creating one of the most serious crises in the history of the Indian Republic. Named after Babur, the mosque was known as the Babri Masjid. It was the contention of the Hindu zealots that the mosque stood on the site of a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Rama, the divine hero of the *Ramayana* epic. A political and archaeological controversy over the site still rages, with politicians and scholars weighing in on both sides.

The *Baburnama* leaves no doubt that its writer was, in his own distinctive way, a devout and occasionally militant Muslim. In his autobiography Babur repeatedly announces his intention of destroying Hindu temples and images. These declarations were clearly intended, in part, to garner support among local Indian Muslims. So far as actually building mosques and demolishing temples, Babur's declarations were almost certainly greatly in excess of his real intentions. Still, if he had indeed erected

mosques on the sites of temples (and there is no clear evidence that he did), he would have done no more than Hindu rulers had themselves done centuries earlier. Archaeological evidence indicates that many important Hindu temples are built upon earlier Buddhist sites; the great Krishna temple of Mathura, for example, stands on what was probably a Buddhist monastery.

Despite Babur's protestations of religious zeal, it is clear from the pages of his autobiography that he was no bigot. Hindus evidently frequented his court, and many Hindus entered his service. The Sikhs—who were to become dedicated adversaries of the Mughal state in the seventeenth century—have long cherished a story, preserved in their scriptural tradition, about an encounter between Babur and Guru Nanak, the founder of their faith. In the process of sacking a town in the Punjab, Babur's soldiers are said to have imprisoned Guru Nanak and one of his disciples. Learning of a miracle performed by the Guru, Babur visited him in prison. Such was the presence of the Guru that Babur is said to have fallen at his feet and cried: "On the face of this faqir one sees God himself."

In any event, it is beyond dispute that Babur's descendants presided over a virtually unprecedented efflorescence in Hindu religious activity. Hinduism as we know it today, especially the Hinduism of north India, was essentially shaped in the early years of Mughal rule, often with the active participation and support of the rulers and their officials and feudatories. The *Ramcharitmanas*, for example, the version of the *Ramayana* that was to be canonized as the central text of north Indian devotional practice, was composed in Akbar's reign by the great saint-poet Tulsidas.

Mughal rule also coincided with a great renaissance in Krishnaite theology. It was in this period that Rupa Goswami and other disciples of the Bengali mystic Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rediscovered and mapped out the sacred geography of the Krishna legend. The region consecrated to Krishna lies between Agra and Delhi, the two principal centers of Mughal power in the sixteenth century. The road connecting these two imperial cities runs right past the sacred sites of this area. It has frequently been observed that the Mughals could easily have persecuted the Hindu saints and pilgrims who were then engaged in rediscovering those sites had they wished to. But, far from suppressing the burgeoning activity in that area, Akbar and his nobles actively supported it.

The Hindu generals and officials of Akbar's court built several of the most

important temples in this area, with Akbar's active encouragement. Akbar was personally responsible for sustaining some of these temples; he granted land and revenue in perpetuity to no less than thirty-five of them. Indeed, Hinduism would scarcely be recognizable today if Krishnaite theology and Krishna-devotion had been actively suppressed in the sixteenth century. As a living practice, contemporary Hinduism would not be what it is if not for the practices initiated under Mughal rule. The sad irony is that the Hindu fanatics who destroyed the Babri Mosque were attacking a symbol of the very accommodations that made their own faith possible.

The last ruler in Babur's dynastic line was the tragic Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862), who was crowned in Delhi at a time when the British had already taken control of most of northern India. The last emperor ruled over little more than his own palace, yet it was in his name that millions of people across India rose in a desperate, failed bid to expel the British in 1857. In the bloody aftermath, Bahadur Shah was exiled to Rangoon, where he died. On a visit to Rangoon earlier this year, I learned that the current Indian Ambassador to Burma, a Christian career diplomat from the northeastern state of Mizoram, had taken the initiative to restore and to refurbish Bahadur Shah's modest burial-place. I can think of no more appropriate tribute to the imaginative power of Mughal tolerance.

Wheeler M. Thackston's splendidly illustrated translation of *The Baburnama* is the third English translation of the work. The first, by William Erskine, appeared in 1826, and the second, the famous version by Annette Beveridge, was published between 1912 and 1921. For all her literary talents, Annette Beveridge was not a professional scholar, and Thackston, who is a professor of Near Eastern languages at Harvard, does not mince his words in his criticism of her translation. It reads, he declares, "like a student's effort—all the words have been looked up in the dictionary and put together."

Clearly Thackston is something of a Babur himself, to tilt so blithely at a work that earned the admiration of E. M. Forster's generation. Having myself first encountered *The Baburnama* as a schoolboy, in the Beveridge translation, I was initially outraged at Thackston's easy dismissal of his predecessor. Comparing key passages, however, I found that Thackston had, on the whole, fulfilled his promise of a more "fluent, idiomatic and colloquial" rendition. If anything, he has fulfilled it too well. A sentence that Bev-

eridge renders as "Stay here while I look along the Gava road" becomes, in Thackston's translation, "You stay here.... I'll go check out the Gava road." But then I know of no rule that requires that Babur sound more like an Edwardian gentleman than a Connecticut mallrat.

In his useful and informative introduction, Thackston informs us that "Mughal" is a misnomer for the dynasty that Babur founded. Babur and his descendants identified themselves as "Gurkani," or sons-in-law, the Timurids having married into the line of Jenghis Khan. For Babur, the word "Mughal" denoted various "quasi-Buddhistic, quasi-shamanistic" groups and tribes in the remoter parts of central Asia. And his loathing of Mughals surpassed even his detestation of Uzbeks, Shias, Afghans and assorted infidels. "Havoc and destruction," writes Babur, "have always emanated from the Mughal nation. Up to the present date they have rebelled against me five times—not from any particular impropriety on my part, for they have often done the same with their own khans." Yet it is probably too late to entertain objections to "Mogul" as a title for powerful rulers. Are we likely ever to open *The New York Times* and find Eisner or Turner referred to as gurkanis?

Misnamed or not, Babur's dynasty became a synonym for magnificence. For over a century, official histories, British and Indian, have contrived to make the Mughal period a paradigm of Indian statehood. The governments of post-independence India and Pakistan, like the British colonial regime before them, have striven to appropriate aspects of Mughal symbolism. To this day, the Prime Ministers of India deliver their annual Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Mughal fort in Delhi. But the Mughals have not been well-served by this official attention, at home or abroad. Having been credited with all the artistic and cultural achievements of "medieval India," they now tend also to attract more than their share of the blame for the perceived failures of that time. It is in the nature of symbols of official grandiosity that they sometimes become the focus of frustrations that ought to be directed elsewhere. This exaggerated political emphasis on the Mughals probably contributed to the escalation of the Babri Mosque controversy.

In fact, the Mughal empire never cov-

Mint of the Empire

What strange animal sleeps
curled around my father's
heart tonight? Moon silvers
his eyes, mint
of the empire. Father,
I'd say, when he was
alive, explain this vain,
wild country, bristling
and quilled, and mighty
and loud. Land of Shaky Heart, of
the tall night-windows rattling,
and of the tired, dumb beast, teeth bared
a little, wrapped fast about its luscious fruit.

STEVE KRONEN

ered the whole of the Indian subcontinent. In its most brilliant period, it had barely a toehold in the Deccan peninsula. The later Mughals tried hard to extend their domains, but their southern border tended to snap up like a rubber band every time they took a finger off its edge. Aurangzeb, the last of the six great Mughals, who ruled from 1659 to 1707, effectively doomed the empire by overextending it in the south.

In the long view, the Mughal period was no more than a lucky time-out, a magnificent hallucination whose end had been conceived even before it was born. The truth is that, while Babur was fighting his epic battles in the Indo-Gangetic plain, the future of the subcontinent was being decided in a series of much smaller engagements on the west coast, where various kings and rulers were fighting the Portuguese. For the Indian subcontinent as a whole, the decisive battle of the sixteenth century was probably not Babur's engagement at Panipat (as I was taught in school and college), but rather the battle of Diu.

It was there, in 1509, that a Portuguese fleet attacked and defeated the combined naval forces of the Muslim ruler of Gujarat, the Hindu king of Calicut, and the Sultan of Egypt. On the occasion of his victory, the Portuguese viceroy Dom Francisco de Alameida gave the moral of the outcome: "As long as you may be powerful at sea, you will hold India as yours; and if you do not possess this power, little will avail you a fortress on the shore." He was very prescient. To the Mughals fell the thankless task of tending the fortress on the shore.

Astonishingly, Babur had no knowledge of the Portuguese presence in western India or he thought them beneath notice. He never so much as mentioned them, though by the time he was seated on the throne of Delhi the Portuguese had already founded a major settlement on the west coast in Goa. Babur

remained, to the end, a child of the steppes. Having never seen the sea, he could scarcely be expected to possess an appreciation of naval power.

Babur's descendants had the advantage of him: they extended their domains all the way to both coasts. Yet they too, to a degree that is quite baffling, had their gaze turned resolutely inland. Their emissaries to Persia generally took the difficult and dangerous overland route rather than the much easier seagoing one. It is hard to imagine a greater handicap for rulers who would have to

contend with an age of maritime power. The saddest aspect of Babur's brief Indian sojourn is that he died without seeing the greatest gift that the subcontinent could have given him: the open ocean. What would he have made of it, this endlessly questing, insatiably curious man of the steppes? We can only wonder.

AMITAV GHOSH's new novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery*, will be published by Avon Books.

Where's Papa?

BY MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi

(Doubleday, 582 pp., \$27.50)

Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi report that their book is about a conspiracy, and indeed it is, though not the one they have in mind. Pope John Paul II and the CIA were not, as these writers breathlessly claim, in a secret alliance to overthrow communism. Their common interest in its collapse was one of the most obvious facts of their time. But celebrity journalism, the great man theory of history and the personality cult of Pope John Paul II have indeed conspired to produce a rather special book.

Carl Bernstein is not fluent in Italian or Polish. He has never covered the Vatican. He has not studied in any depth the history, ancient or modern, of religion or religious institutions. Surely I am not the only one who had trouble picturing him sweating sentences like this one, describing Father Karol Wojtyla's first Mass: "His former teacher Father Kazimierz Figlewicz served him as *manuductor*, the elder confrère who guides a new priest during the celebration, steadying him as, for the first time, he experiences the tremendous power involved in the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ."

Perhaps that sentence came from the laptop of Marco Politi, who is a Catholic. Still, both men are journalists, investigative journalists. And journalists must rely, at least in part, on their senses. Only the eyes of faith, however, permit one to recognize the bread and wine of the Mass as anything other than bread and wine. Of

course, journalists also rely on tips. Perhaps the metaphysics of the bread and the wine were leaked to Bernstein and Politi. (Follow the bread....) But how did they confirm it?

That much of this book is borrowed is obvious. In citing John Paul II's trip to Korea in 1984, Bernstein and Politi write: "Martyrdom was the climax of readiness to die for the splendor of the truth.... 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians,' he told the crowd in Seoul, quoting Tertullian." Tertullian was a North African writer whose late second-century *Apology* was immensely influential, despite the fact that Tertullian himself died excommunicated from the Church. I don't know about Politi, but I will bet dollars to doughnuts that Bernstein doesn't know Tertullian from tortellini. Now, Tertullian was the first great controversialist in the Church, and so analogies between him and John Paul are indeed worth pursuing; but these authors cannot give such pursuit.

Mistakes abound. The pallium conferred on John Paul was not a symbol of papal power, as the authors have it. The pallium is conferred on all archbishops every June 29. Nor were John Paul's vestments green at his inaugural Mass; they were white. Nor is there anything novel about the Italians referring to the Pope by his family name; Paul VI was known as Papa Montini, John XXIII as Papa Roncalli, and so on. Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh, though considered arch by some, is not yet an archbishop, as the

book states. And so on.

More than the minutiae are out of whack in this "international publishing event." The same authors who insist on a grand and "hidden" alliance between Reagan and the Pope fail to note that the Vatican opposed the economic sanctions that the United States imposed on Poland when martial law was declared in 1981. And nowhere do the authors evidence any grasp at all of the workings of the Vatican. They prefer to rely on the conventions of political potboilers. The most egregious flaw in their "analysis" is owed to their aggrandizement of their hero.

Their sensationalist thesis requires that the Pope be a figure of spectacular power, a spiritual leader who famously needs no divisions. They do not seem to know about the severe limitations on papal prerogative. On paper (and in the papers) the Pope is all-powerful; and, indeed, the papacy has become more powerful within Catholicism over the past two centuries. But for 2,000 years the curia has been devising ways to limit that power. Cardinals are not known as princes of the Church for nothing: they are men of power and influence. The curia that surrounds the Pope and the cardinals in Rome is conservative because such conservatism makes the rigorous application of absolute power a difficult project, even for a man as forceful as John Paul II. He has succeeded in altering the perception of the papacy, from that of an ecclesiastical CEO to that of a principal teacher of faith. And he is a figure of spiritual power and political consequence. But he was not born on Krypton.

Bernstein's and Politi's portrait of the Pope is also flawed. They note that he is a man of prayer, even of intense, mystical prayer, but they fail to see how the Pope's regimen of prayer might be responsible for the moral consistency of his worldview. They content themselves with throwaway lines such as this: "Karol Wojtyla believes that there is always a reason for suffering; he sees pain as a lesser sort of martyrdom." Well, yes, but the redemptive power of suffering is not a concept unique to Papa Wojtyla. This is a basic Christian belief.

Perhaps it is unfair to expect theology and the history of theology from Bernstein and Politi. But unsavory reporting? Surely that's not asking too much. Consider, however, that a significant portion of their documentation for the imposition of martial law in Poland and the subsequent collapse of communism comes from the memoirs of General Wojciech Jaruzelski. His memoirs are elsewhere in the book termed "dubious"; and as a historical

source, they are indeed dubious. Had things turned out differently, the general's memoirs would be discussing his inner identification with the worldview of Yuri Andropov.

Dubious, too, are the *post facto* testaments of various Reagan administration officials, all of whom have a certain interest in being perceived as the men who brought communism to its knees. It turns out that only John Paul II himself takes no credit for the demise of communism. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he wrote: "It would be simplistic to say that Divine Providence caused the fall of communism. It fell by itself as a consequence of its own mistakes and abuses. It fell by itself because of its own inherent weakness." This is no statement of naïve humility on the Pope's part. He is not naïve. He realizes, as the authors and the Reaganites do not, that their role was to kick out the last crutch from under a hobbling regime that was hollow to the core.

What was so hidden, so secret, about the history here detailed? The authors use a variety of literary devices to create a sense of drama and surprise about John Paul II's contact with Solidarity (then banned under martial law) when he went to Poland in 1983. That visit was indeed filled with high drama. Still, how is a speech given before a million people part of a "hidden" history? The visits of Secretary of State Alexander Haig to the Pope, like those of any other prominent government official, were recorded at the time on the front page of *L'Osservatore Romano*. That William Casey, then director of the CIA (and a Catholic), talked with John Paul about spiritual topics, that each asked the other to pray for him, is hardly remarkable. Such topics may not be the standard discourse in newsrooms, but what else would one discuss with the Pope?

The whole thing is a shame, because there are some valuable notions in this book, buried under the hype. Almost as an aside, Bernstein and Politi note that "the pope's *Ostpolitik* was grounded in the belief that the Church must speak not just for Western Europe, but for a single individual entity and culture, from the Urals to the Atlantic," and they cite John Paul's moral rejection of the artificial division of Europe at the Elbe. This reiteration of a common European culture was a distinctive contribution by John Paul, and one perhaps that only a Pole could have provided. Before the division of Europe could end, politicians and pundits and ordinary people had to recognize the artificiality of the division, and to picture a Europe without it. John Paul embodied the common recoil from the arbitrariness of that division.

The distinctiveness of Polish Catholicism, and what the authors take to be its inapplicability to the universal Church, is another theme raised by this book that will weigh heavily in the historical treatment of this pontificate. It is a telling fact that, whereas Catholicism served as a bulwark against the decaying communist state in Poland, it had been under siege since the capitalists came to town. This is, in part, good news: the vibrancy of Western, liberal culture is strong. Still, in his attacks on the materialism of Western culture, on its utilitarianism and its disregard for the dignity of the human person, the Pope is broaching genuine philosophical and social difficulties.

Who can deny that Western materialism is reaching deranged proportions? It is no wonder that Western societies are now riddled with spiritual quests and religious improvisations, individual and collective. These searchings are as yet ill-nourished and often misguided, as evidenced by the rise of New Age cults which peddle an easy faith—spirituality for busy people—without moral or intellectual rigor. In 1979, on his first trip to Poland, John Paul II was met with shouts of "We want God!" It turned out that the same people also wanted CD players and BMWs and liberal abortion laws. Here in America, where we already have our CDs and BMWs and our liberal abortion laws, there are echoes of the shouts of those Poles. These echoes may themselves become shouts, or they may get lost in the dust. But John Paul II has been courageous and provocative in proclaiming a more expansive view of human personhood. Long after he is gone, his defense of human dignity will be read by those who are serious about spiritual matters.

These matters are all touched on in Bernstein's and Politi's book, but they are lost in all the cloak and dagger. This is, in the end, a silly book. And silly books on serious subjects can cause significant distortions. The lesson to be drawn from the collapse of communism is nothing conspiratorial. It is, rather, open and philosophical: that, in the struggle between a closed society and an open society, an open society has the insurmountable advantage of giving human freedom its due.

Totalitarian societies require the isolation of the individual and the destruction of mediating social organizations between the individual and the state. When John Paul II gathered 2 million Poles in a meadow outside Krakow in 1979, those Poles realized they were not alone; they saw that the Church was precisely the kind of social organization that could protect them from the state.

It was only a matter of time before the fragility of communism was exposed. What John Paul II did, in short, was not nothing. But neither was it dependent on briefings from Reagan administration officials. This Pope, so often derided in the West for his "oppressive" ways, gave voice to human freedom when it counted in the East, and the universal impulse toward human freedom did the rest. No scoop there. Just the obvious, exciting truth.

MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS is a doctoral student in church history at the Catholic University of America.

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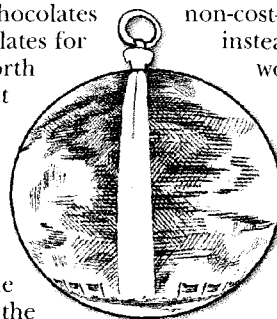
MY EARLIEST CHRISTMAS MEMORY is of dogmatic conflict. I spent hours trying to disabuse my elementary-school classmates of their belief in Santa Claus. My passionate (and, I should point out, correct) arguments met with horrified indignation. Historical vindication—most of my peers came around to my point of view by the time we reached high school—did little to win back their warm regard. In fact, I have just one other opinion that consistently provokes the same level of vituperation as Santa heresy. It happens to impugn another holiday nostrum: gift giving. My case is rooted in a simple, and I would say noble, desire to promote human progress. After all, when we troop to the mall to pick out presents for our loved ones, we are reverting to barbaric rituals that predate the rise of trade. “An intensive circulation of gifts and return gifts, of ceremonial and hallowed offerings,” writes economic historian Georges Duby, “permeated the entire social structure” of pre-modern Europe. The proliferation of presents, while economically inefficient—“These offerings partly destroyed the products of labor”—were justified as promoting “goodwill.” Worst of all, you couldn’t escape the gift cycle. Quoting anthropologist Marcel Mauss, Duby notes “[B]asically they were strictly obligatory, under pain of private or open warfare.” While these scholars were describing a primitive economy, it still holds true. If you don’t believe me about private or open warfare, try telling, say, your girlfriend that you don’t do gifts. More on that below.

THE GIFT-BASED ECONOMY DIED out because currency rendered it obsolete. So it’s curious that one month out of the year we resurrect this brutally inefficient custom. It has little to do with generosity: gift transactions are enforced by threat of social alienation—the accusation of being a “Scrooge”—and undertaken with the expectation of receiving equal compensation. (Unilateral gifts, like those from parents to young children, are OK in my book.) But if greed is the motivation for holiday gift giving, then it’s misplaced. Which brings me to the crux of my economic argument against rampant present-purchases. Gift givers and receivers actually deprive one

another of wealth. How? Well, holiday presents are usually not functional goods, such as cereal, but instead luxuries that we wouldn’t buy for ourselves, such as fancy chocolates. If you and I exchange boxes of chocolates (or some such frippery), we’ve essentially forced one another to purchase chocolates for ourselves. But there’s a reason people don’t often buy themselves fancy chocolates: most of us would rather get M&Ms and spend the rest of the money on something else. Christmas spawns industries devoted to useless goods like fruitcake and flavored popcorn. More commonly, it forces us to pay for things we like, but whose cost exceeds their worth to us. Suppose a box of chocolates costs \$15. I don’t buy chocolates for myself, because they’re worth only \$5 to me. You choose not to buy \$15 cologne because it’s worth only \$5 to you. Swapping chocolates for cologne penalizes each of us \$10. Yes, sometimes you can buy somebody a gift he would buy for himself. But the more likely this is, the higher the likelihood that he actually *has* it already. OK, so gifts detract from our material welfare. But, you point out, they still provide psychological benefits—goodwill, etc.—beyond their tangible value. The problem is, you can use that argument to preserve any inefficient practice. Gift-based societies also buried the dead with all their worldly possessions. This often impoverished the deceased’s surviving family, but it gave them considerable psychological benefits. Of course, once society figured out its wastefulness, those psychological benefits disappeared. Why should we derive satisfaction from impoverishing those we hold dear?

NOW, SOME IN THE PRO-GIFT FAC-tion actually argue on economic grounds, too. The economy, they say, depends on frenzied holiday-induced sales. Actually, it doesn’t. Economists incessantly lecture us to save more—our national savings rate is notoriously low, after all—and consume less. And discontinuing gifts would give consumers more satisfaction with less stuff, by letting them choose what goods they end up with when the tinsel or the Menorah have all been packed away. Those previously employed in the field of fruitcake manufacturing would find work making things people actually want. Worse still, gifts deflate productivity. Indeed, the culture of gifts glorifies non-productivity. The best gifts must be laboriously sought (like this year’s ridiculously scarce toy sensation Tickle Me Elmo; a *New York Post* headline the week before Christmas caught the spirit: “SCALP ME

ELMO!” it read) or, better still, hand-crafted. According to gift etiquette, a present’s value directly correlates with the effort put into it. But, people ask, wouldn’t I like to own a sweater that my mother knitted for me? No. In a fraction of the time it would take her to knit a sweater, my Mom could earn enough money at work to buy me a much nicer sweater and have plenty of cash left over for herself. A homemade sweater would merely make me feel guilty that Mom had wasted all those hours during which she could have been enjoying a good book. If jobless mothers insist upon adding to the GNP every Christmas, they can calculate the hours they would have wasted on non-cost-effective sweater-knitting and instead use that time laboring in a workplace that uses efficiency of scale—say, a steel factory—and send a portion of the proceeds to their children. That check from home would be so much more satisfying if you knew your mother had spent a whole day smelting iron for it.



OBVIOUSLY, MY LOGIC HAS not yet won over a majority of the population—most importantly, that segment of the population that is dating me. A month after we began dating, my girlfriend celebrated her birthday. Shortly before her birthday dinner, I stopped at the corner store looking for a card. I ruled out any cards featuring big-eyed fuzzy animals or messages that end in exclamation points. That eliminated all the birthday cards. Giving her a get-well card struck me as inappropriate. After long minutes of deliberation I settled on a relatively understated anniversary card, taking care to cross out the word “anniversary” and write in “birthday.” My anti-gift arguments having met with an unenthusiastic reception, I decided to throw in a present. In an effort to preserve my intellectual integrity, I gave her a gift certificate, the closest acceptable substitute for cash. *So far so good.* Where I probably went wrong, in hindsight, was in my choice of gift certificate. I recycled one that a friend had given me the previous year. Re-gifting wasn’t a problem, I figured. We could use the certificate (for a meal at the Cheesecake Factory) on a date. For weeks, though, she declined to go. Eventually, after I pressed, she revealed that the gift certificate had expired months before her birthday. The blame for this tragedy, obviously, rests on society. Last week, I gave my girlfriend a scarf, a nice one, not previously owned. Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Winds of Change in Japan

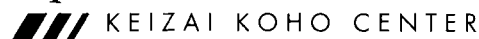
MYTH...Japanese consumers favor domestic products—even when the cost is greater—and Japan's market is closed to outsiders.

FACT...These perceptions may have had some basis in the past, but today they're about as significant as the samurai, for recent economic and social trends in Japan paint a far different picture. Indeed, as Takao Kondo, president of Budweiser Japan Co., notes in *Business Week*, "In the past two years, more changes in Japan have happened than in the last 40." Consider the following:

- A long recession has made Japanese consumers more value-conscious shoppers, especially for American products that are competitively priced and more tailored to Japanese tastes.
- The move toward deregulating the economy has boosted the expansion of such popular U.S. retail chains as Toys "R" Us and The Gap, the new hot spot on Tokyo's fashionable Ginza.
- Increased leisure time and changing lifestyles have generated a boom in leisure activities, and sales of U.S.-made recreational vehicles, outdoor apparel and camping equipment are surging.
- Japanese consumers' changing tastes are resulting in ever-bigger appetites for U.S. food products. Result: the U.S. share of Japan's agricultural market last year—including specialty foods like gourmet coffees and ice creams—was a record \$11 billion.
- For reasons as diverse as currency exchange rates and strategic alliances to maintain global competitiveness, Japanese companies are increasingly looking outside traditional relationships. From auto parts to construction materials, U.S. companies in various industries are becoming key suppliers to major Japanese firms.

These and other new trends and changes have helped spur U.S. exports to Japan—up over 20% last year—and that's good news for American business and Japanese consumers alike.

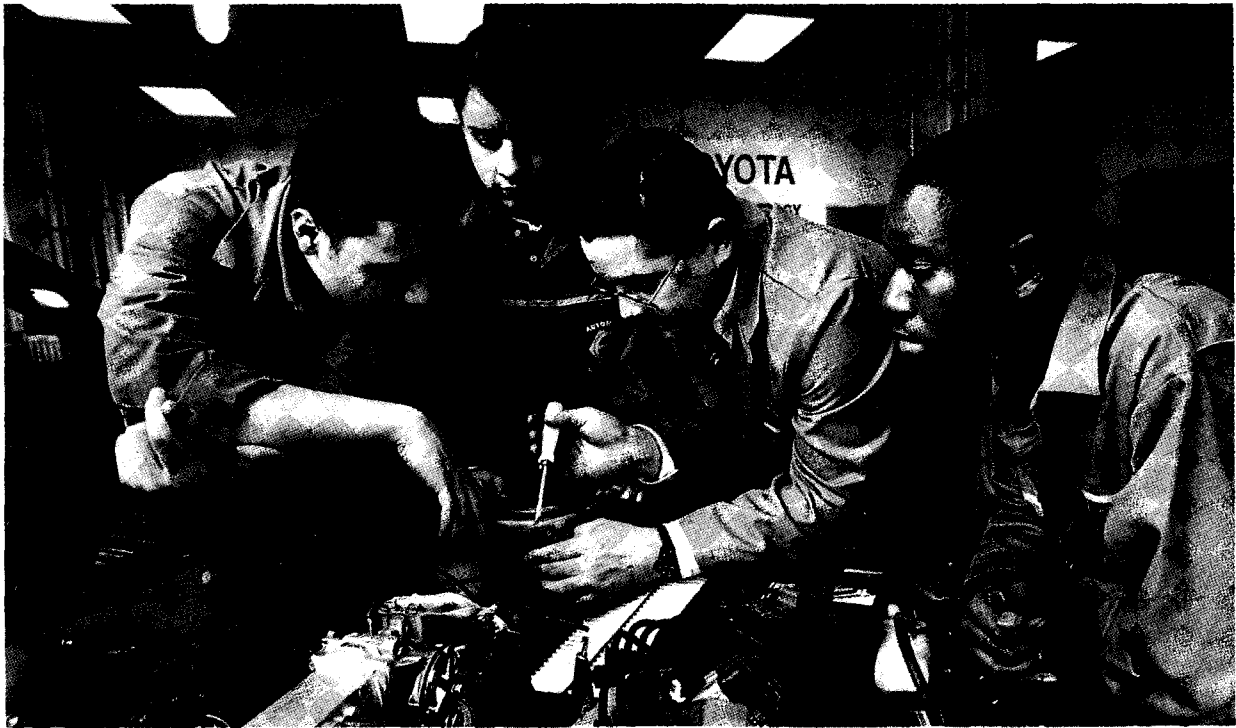
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